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RED STAR MAGAZINE JULY

POLARIS -- OF THE SNOWS

Exciting adventure in a fantastic hidden empire beyond the Pole

Astounding mystery of the "dead-alive" house

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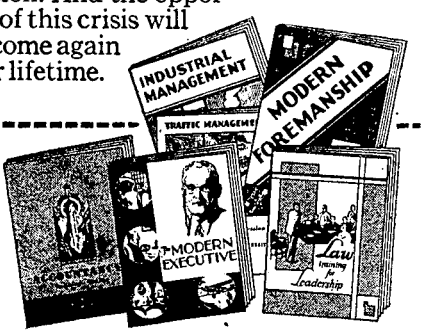

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Vol. IV JULY, 1942 No. 3

Complete Book-Length Novel

Polaris—of the Snows ..... **Charles B. Stilson** 6

SARDANES!—mystical volcanic valley hidden like a brilliant emerald in the white fastnesses of the Antarctic! No man from the outer world had gazed upon it. No man had seen its wonders . . . until Polaris, fur-clad Viking waif of the ice-floes, revealed to the girl he loved its fabulous treasures

This story was published serially, beginning in the December 18, 1915 issue of All-Story Cavalier Magazine

Novelet

Serapion ..... **Francis Stevens** 78

Beyond this borderland of sight and sense, this familiar world of ours, there is—what? We breathe the air of earth and it animates us. We walk in the sunlight and it warms us. But neither sun nor air gives us even a hint of the infinite bleakness of interstellar space. As to the limits of that borderland, who can say? And what possible explanation could there be for a dead spirit?

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This story was published serially, beginning in the June 19, 1920 issue of The Argosy Magazine

Features

A. Merritt on Modern Witchcraft 134

The Readers' Viewpoint 137

This magazine is now published once a month. The August issue will be on sale June 17.

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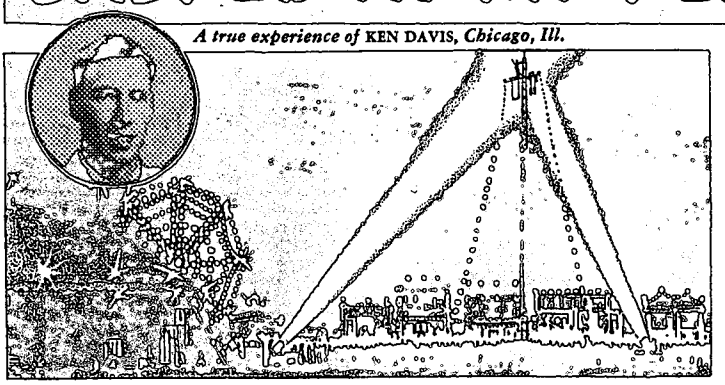
"THE HORRIFIED CROWD GASPED AT MY PLIGHT!"

A true experience of KEN DAVIS, *Chicago, Ill.*



"SEVENTY FEET ABOVE the crowd at a carnival, I was performing my high aerial act," writes Mr. Davis. "I was a bit nervous, for this was our opening night . . . when anything can happen. I work without arm guards, wires, nets, or safety devices of any kind. There can't be any mistake in such an act.

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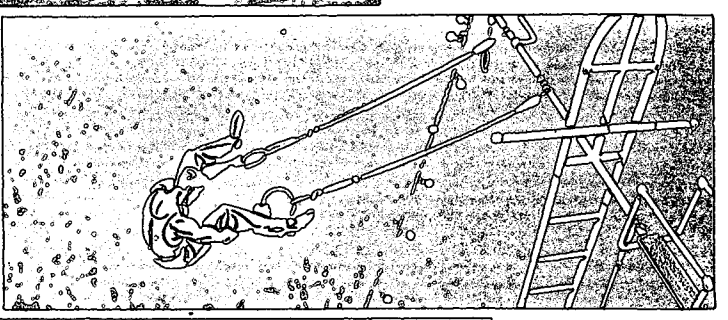
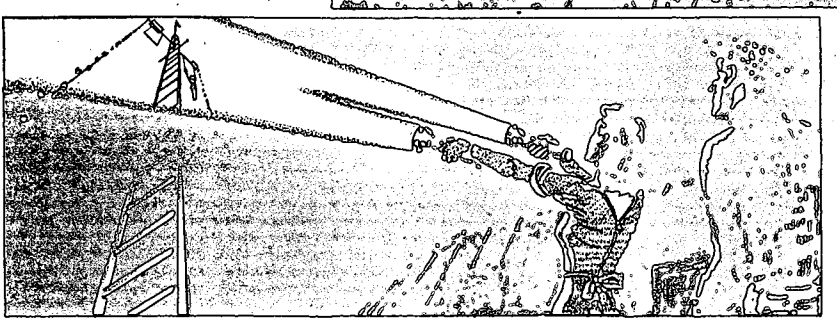
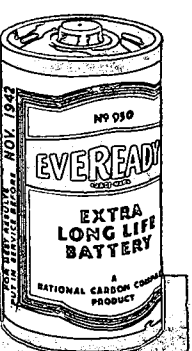




"FOR AN AWFUL INSTANT I thought I was a 'goner.' Suddenly—in the nick of time—the bright beams of two 'Eveready' flashlights in my wife's steady hands flooded the rings with light. I finished my act. Thanks to my wife's coolness and foresight, and those dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, a possible tragedy was averted. (*Signed*) Ken Davis"



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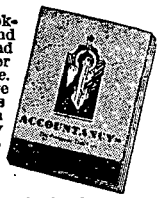

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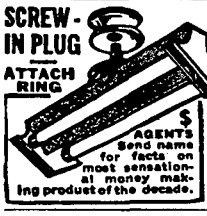

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Polaris--Of the Snows

By CHARLES B. STILSON

"NORTH! North! To the north, Polaris. Tell the world—ah, tell them —boy— The north! The north! You must go, Polaris!"

Throwing the covers from his low couch, the old man arose and stood, a giant, tottering figure. Higher and higher he towered. He tossed his arms high, his features became convulsed; his eyes glazed. In his throat the rising tide of dissolution choked his voice to a hoarse rattle. He swayed.

With a last desperate rallying of his failing powers he extended his right arm and

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This story appeared in The All-Story Cavalier for December 18, 1915

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Polaris hurled a spear and another brave Sardanian gave up the ghost

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pointed to the north. Then he fell, as a tree falls, quivered, and was still.

His companion bent over the pallet, and with light, sure fingers closed his eyes. In all the world he knew, Polaris never had seen a human being die. In all the world he now was utterly alone!

He sat down at the foot of the cot, and for many minutes gazed steadily at the wall with fixed, unseeing eyes. A sputtering little lamp, which stood on a table in the center of the room; flickered and went out. The flames of the fireplace played strange tricks in the strange room. In their uncertain glare, the features of the dead man seemed to writhe uncannily.

Garments and hangings of the skins of beasts stirred in the wavering shadows, as though the ghosts of their one-time tenants were struggling to reassert their dominion. At the one door and the lone window the wind whispered, fretted, and shrieked. Snow as fine and hard as the sands of the sea rasped across the panes. Somewhere without a dog howled—the long, throaty ululation of the wolf breed. Another joined in, and another, until a full score of canine voices wailed a weird requiem.

Unheeding, the living man sat as still as the dead.

Once, twice, thrice, a little clock struck a halting, uncertain stroke. When the fourth hour was passed it rattled crazily and stopped. The fire died away to embers; the embers paled to ashes. As though they were aware that something had gone awry, the dogs never ceased their baying. The wind rose higher and higher, and assailed the house with repeated shocks. Pale-gray and changeless day that lay across a sea of snows peered furtively through the windows.

At length the watcher relaxed his silent vigil. He arose, cast off his coat of white furs, stepped to the wall of the room opposite to the door, and shoved back a heavy wooden panel. A dark aperture was disclosed. He disappeared and came forth presently, carrying several large chunks of what appeared to be crumbling black rock.

He threw them on the dying fire, where they snapped briskly, caught fire, and flamed brightly. They were coal.

From a platform above the fireplace he dragged down a portion of the skinned carcass of a walrus. With the long, heavy-bladed knife from his belt he cut it into strips. Laden with the meat, he opened the door and went out into the dim day.

The house was set against the side of a cliff of solid, black, lusterless coal. A compact stockade of great boulders enclosed the front of the dwelling. From the back of the building, along the base of the cliff, ran a low shed of timber slabs, from which sounded the howling and worrying of the dogs.

As Polaris entered the stockade the clamor was redoubled. The rude plank at the front of the shed, which was its door, was shaken repeatedly as heavy bodies were hurled against it.

Kicking an accumulation of loose snow away from the door, the man took from its racks the bar which made it fast and let it drop forward. A reek of steam floated from its opening. A shaggy head was thrust forth, followed immediately by a great, gray body, which shot out as if propelled from a catapult.

Catching in its jaws the strip of flesh which the man dangled in front of the doorway, the brute dashed across the stockade and crouched against the wall, tearing at the meat. Dog after dog piled pell-mell through the doorway, until at least twenty-five grizzled animals were distributed about the enclosure, bolting their meal of walrus-flesh.

FOR a few moments the man sat on the roof of the shed and watched the animals. Although the raw flesh stiffened in the frigid air before even the jaws of the dogs could devour it and the wind cut like the lash of a whip, the man, coatless and with head and arms bared, seemed to mind neither the cold nor the blast.

He had not the ruggedness of figure or the great height of the man who lay dead within the house. He was of considerably more than medium height, but so broad of shoulder and deep of chest that he seemed short. Every line of his compact figure bespoke unusual strength—the wiry, swift strength of an animal.

His arms, white and shapely, rippled with muscles at the least movement of his fingers. His hands were small, but powerfully shaped. His neck was straight and not long. The thews spread from it to his wide shoulders like those of a splendid athlete. The ears were set close above the angle of a firm jaw, and were nearly hidden in a mass of tawny, yellow hair, as fine as a

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woman's which swept over his shoulders.

Above a square chin were full lips and a thin, aquiline nose. Deep, brown eyes, fringed with black lashes, made a marked contrast with the fairness of his complexion and his yellow hair and brows. He was not more than twenty-four years old.

Presently he re-entered the house. The dogs flocked after him to the door, whining and rubbing against his legs, but he allowed none of them to enter with him. He stood before the dead man and, for the first time in many hours, he spoke:

"For this day, my father, you have waited many years. I shall not delay. I will not fail you."

From a skin sack he filled the small lamp with oil and lighted its wick with a splinter of blazing coal. He set it where its feeble light shone on the face of the dead. Lifting the corpse, he composed its limbs and wrapped it in the great white pelt of a polar bear, tying it with many thongs. Before he hid from view the quiet features he stood back with folded arms and bowed head.

"I think he would have wished this," he whispered, and he sang softly that grand old hymn which has sped so many Christian soldiers from their battlefield. "Nearer, My God, to Thee," he sang in a subdued, melodious baritone. From a shelf of books which hung on the wall he reached a leather-covered volume. "It was his religion," he muttered; "It may be mine," and he read from the book: *"I am the resurrection and the life, whoso believeth in Me, even though he die—"* and on through the sonorous burial service.

He dropped the book within the folds of the bearskin, covered the dead face, and made fast the robe. Although the body was of great weight, he shouldered it without apparent effort, took the lamp in one hand, and passed through the panel in the wall.

Within the bowels of the cliff a large cavern had been hollowed in the coal. In a far corner a gray boulder had been hewn into the shape of a tombstone. On its face were carved side by side two words: "Anne" and "Stephen." At the foot of the stone were a mound and an open grave. He laid the body in the grave and covered it with earth and loose coal.

Again he paused, while the lamplight shone on the tomb.

"May you rest in peace, O Anne, my mother, and Stephen, my father. I never knew you, my mother, and, my father, I knew not who you were nor who I am. I go to carry your message."

HE ROLLED boulders onto the two mounds. The opening to the cave he walled up with other boulders, piling a heap of them and of large pieces of coal until it filled the low arch of the entrance.

In the cabin he made preparations for a journey.

One by one he threw on the fire books and other articles within the room, until little was left but skins and garments of fur and an assortment of barbaric weapons of the chase.

Last he dragged from under the cot a long, oaken chest.

Failing to find its key, he tore the lid from it with his strong hands.

Some articles of feminine wearing apparel which were within it he handled reverently, and at the same time curiously; for they were of cloth. Wonderingly he ran his fingers over silk and fine laces. Those he also burned.

From the bottom of the chest he took a short, brown rifle and a brace of heavy revolvers of a pattern and caliber famous in the annals of the plainsmen. With them were belt and holsters.

He counted the cartridges in the belt. Forty there were, and in the chambers of the revolvers and the magazine of the rifle, eighteen more. Fifty-eight shots with which to meet the perils that lay between himself and that world of men to the north—if, indeed, the passing years had not spoiled the ammunition.

He divested himself of his clothing, bathed with melted snow-water, and dressed himself anew in white furs. An omelet of eggs of wild birds and a cutlet of walrus-flesh sufficed to stay his hunger, and he was ready to face the unknown.

In the stockade was a strongly built sledge. Polaris packed it with quantities of meat both fresh and dried, of which there was a large store in the cabin. What he did not pack on the sledge he threw to the eager dogs.

He laid his harness out on the snow, cracked his long whip, and called up his team. "Octavius, Nero, Julius." Three powerful brutes bounded to him and took their places in the string. "Juno, Hector, Pallas." Three more grizzled snow-runners sprang

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into line. "Marcus." The great, gray leader trotted sedately to the place at the head of the team. A seven-dog team it was, all of them bearing the names before which Rome and Greece had bowed.

Polaris added to the burden of the sledge the brown rifle, several spears, carved from oaken beams and tipped with steel, and a sealskin filled with boiled snow-water. On his last trip into the cabin he took from a drawer in the table a small, flat packet, sewn in membranous parchment.

"This is to tell the world my father's message and to tell who I am," he said, and hid it in an inner pocket of his vest of furs. He buckled on the revolver-belt, took whip and staff from the fireside, and drove his dog-team out of the stockade onto the prairie of snow, closing the gate on the howling chorus left behind.

He proceeded several hundred yards, then tethered his dogs with a word of admonition, and retraced his steps.

In the stockade he did a strange and terrible thing. Long used to seeing him depart from his team, the dogs had scattered and were mumbling their bones in various corners. "If I leave these behind me, they will perish miserably, or they will break out and follow, and I may not take them with me," he muttered.

From dog to dog he passed. To each he spoke a word of farewell. Each he caressed with a pat on the head. Each he killed with a single grip of his muscular hands, gripping them at the nape of the neck, where the bones parted in his powerful fingers. Silently and swiftly he proceeded until only one dog remained alive, old Paulus, the patriarch of the pack.

He bent over the animal, which raised its dim eyes to his and licked at his hands.

"Paulus, dear old friend that I have grown up with; farewell, Paulus," he said. He pressed his face against the noble head of the dog. When he raised it tears were coursing down his cheeks. Then Paulus's spirit sped.

Two by two he dragged the bodies into the cabin.

"Of old a great general in that far world of men burned his ships that he might not turn back. I will not turn back," he murmured. With a splinter of blazing coal he fired the house and the dog-shed. He tore the gate of the stockade from its hinges and cast it into the ruins. With his great strength he toppled over the capping-stones of the wall, and left it a ruin also.

Then he rejoined the dog-team, set his back to the south pole, and began his journey.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WOMAN

PROBABLY in all the world there was not the equal of the team of dogs which Polaris had selected for his journey. Their ancestors in the long ago had been the fierce, gray timberwolves of the north. Carefully cross-bred, the strains in their blood were of the wolf, the great Dane, and the mastiff; but the wolf strain held dominant. They had the loyalty of the mastiff, the strength of the great Dane, and the tireless sinews of the wolf. From the environment of their rearing they were well furred and inured to the cold and hardships of the Antarctic. They would travel far.

Polaris did not ride on the sledge. He ran with the dogs, as swift and tireless as they. A wonderful example of the adaptibility to conditions of the human race, his upbringing had given him the strength and endurance of an animal. He had never seen the dog that he could not run down.

He, too, would travel fast and far.

In the nature of the land through which they journeyed on their first dash to the northward, there were few obstacles to quick progress. It was a prairie of snow, wind-swept, and stretching like a desert as far as eye could discern. Occasionally were upcroppings of coal cliffs similar to the one where had been Polaris's home. On the first drive they made a good fifty miles.

Need of sleep, more than fatigue, warned both man and beasts of camping-time. Polaris, who seemed to have a definite point in view, urged on the dogs for an hour longer than was usual on an ordinary trip, and they came to the border of the immense snow-plain.

To the northeast lay a ridge of what appeared to be snow-covered hills. Beyond the edge of the white prairie was a forest of ice. Millions of jagged monoliths stood and lay, jammed closely together, in every conceivable shape and angle.

At some time a giant ice-flow had crashed down upon the land. It had fretted and torn at the shore, had heaved itself up,

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with its myriad gleaming tusks bared for destruction. Then nature had laid upon it a calm, white hand, and had frozen it quiet and still and changeless.

Away to the east a path was open, which skirted the field of broken ice and led in toward the base of the hills.

Polaris did not take that path. He turned west, following the line of the ice-belt. Presently he found what he sought. A narrow lane led into the heart of the icebergs.

At the end of it, caught in the jaws of two giant bergs, hung fast, as it had hung for years, the sorry wreck of a stout ship. Scarred and rent by the grinding of its prison-ice, and weather-beaten by the rasping of wind-driven snow in a land where the snow never melts, still on the square stern of the vessel could be read the dimming letters which spelled "Yedda."

Polaris unharnessed the pack, and man and dogs crept on board the hulk. It was but a timber shell. Much of the decking had been cut away, and everything movable had been taken from it for the building of the cabin and the shed, now in black ruins fifty miles to the south.

In an angle of the ice-wall, a few yards from the ship, Polaris pitched his camp and built a fire with timbers from the wreck. He struck his flame with a rudely fashioned tinder-box, catching the spark in fine scrapings of wood and nursing it with his breath. He fed the dogs and toasted meat for his own meal at the fire. With a large robe from the sledge he bedded the team snugly beside the fire.

With his own parka of furs he clambered aboard the ship, found a bunk in the forecastle, and curled up for the night.

Several hours later hideous clamor broke his dreamless slumber. He started from the bunk and leaped from the ship's side into the ice-lane. Every dog of the pack was bristling and snarling with rage. Mixed with their uproar was a deeper, hoarser note of anger that came from the throat of no dog—a note which the man knew well.

The team was bunched a few feet ahead of the fire as Polaris came over the rail of the ship. Almost shoulder to shoulder the seven crouched, every head pointed up the path. They were quivering from head to tail with anger, and seemed to be about to charge.

Whipping the dogs back, the son of the snows ran forward to meet the danger alone. He could afford to lose no dogs. He had forgotten the guns, but he bore weapons with which he was better acquainted.

With a long-hafted spear in his hand and the knife loosened in his belt he bounded up the pathway and stood, wary but unafraid, fronting an immense white bear.

He was not a moment too soon. The huge animal had set himself for the charge, and in another instant would have hurled its enormous weight down on the dogs. The beast hesitated, confronted by this new enemy, and sat back on its haunches to consider.

Knowing his foe aforetime, Polaris took that opportunity to deliver his own charge. He bounded forward and drove his tough spear with all his strength into the white chest below the throat. Balanced as it was on its haunches, the shock of the man's onset upset the bear, and it rolled backward, a jet of blood spurting over its shaggy coat and dyeing the snow.

Like a flash the man followed his advantage. Before the brute could turn or recover Polaris reached its back and drove his long-bladed knife under the left shoulder. Twice he struck deep, and sprang aside. The battle was finished.

The beast made a last mighty effort to rear erect, tearing at the spear-shaft, and went down under an avalanche of snarling, ferocious dogs. For the team could refrain from conflict no longer, and charged like a flying wedge to worry the dying foe.

Replenishing his store of meat with strips from the newly slain bear, Polaris allowed the pack to make a famous meal on the carcass. When they were ready to take the trail again, he fired the ship with a blazing brand, and they trotted forth along the snow-path to the east with the skeleton of the stout old Yedda roaring and flaming behind them.

FOR days Polaris pressed northward. To his right extended the range of the white hills. To the left was the seemingly endless ice-field that looked like the angry billows of a storm-tossed sea which had been arrested at the height of tempest, its white-capped, upthrown waves paralyzed cold and dead.

Down the shore-line, where his path lay, a fierce wind blew continuously and with increasing rigor. He was puzzled to find that instead of becoming warmer as he pro-

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gressed to the north and away from the pole, the air was more frigid than it had been in his homeland. Hardy as he was, there were times when the furious blasts chilled him to the bone and when his magnificent dogs flinched and whimpered.

Still he pushed on. The sledge grew lighter as the provisions were consumed, and there were few marches that did not cover forty miles. Polaris slept with the dogs, huddled in robes. The very food they ate they must warm with the heat of their bodies before it could be devoured. There was no vestige of anything to make fuel for a camp-fire.

He had covered some hundreds of miles when he found the contour of the country was changing. The chain of the hills swung sharply away to the east, and the path broadened, fanwise, east and west. An undulating plain of snow and ice-caps, rent by many fissures, lay ahead.

This was the most difficult traveling of all.

In the middle of their second march across the plain, the man noticed that his gray snow-coursers were uneasy. They threw their snouts up to the wind and growled angrily, scenting some unseen danger. Although he had seen nothing larger than a fox since he entered the plain, bear signs had been frequent, and Polaris welcomed a hunt to replenish his larder.

He halted the team and outspanned the dogs so they would be unhampered by the sledge in case of attack. Bidding them remain behind, he went to reconnoiter.

He clambered to the summit of a snow-covered ice-crest and gazed ahead. A great joy welled into his heart, a thanksgiving so keen that it brought a mist to his eyes.

He had found man!

Not a quarter of a mile ahead of him, standing in the lee of a low ridge, were two figures unmistakably human. At the instant he saw them the wind brought to his nostrils, sensitive as those of an animal, a strange scent that set his pulses bounding. He *smelled* man and man's fire! A thin spiral of smoke was curling over the back of the ridge. He hurried forward.

Hidden by the undulations of slopes and drifts he approached within a few feet of them without being discovered. On the point of crying aloud to them he stopped, paralyzed, and crouched behind a drift. For these men to whom his heart called madly—the first of his own kind—but one whom he had ever seen—were tearing at each other's throats like maddened beasts in an effort to take life!

Like a man in a dream, Polaris heard their voices raised in curses. They struggled fiercely but weakly. They were on the brink of one of the deep fissures, or crevasses, which seamed this strange, forgotten land. Each was striving to push the other into the chasm.

Then one who seemed the stronger wrenched himself free and struck the other in the face. The stricken man staggered, threw his arms above his head, toppled, and crashed down the precipice.

Polaris's first introduction to the civilization which he sought was murder! For those were civilized white men who had fought. They wore garments of cloth. Revolvers hung from their belts. Their speech, of which he had heard little but cursing, was civilized English.

Pale to the lips, the son of the wilderness leaped over the snow-drift and strode toward the survivor. In the teachings of his father, murder was the greatest of all crimes; its punishment was swift death. This man who stood on the brink of the chasm which had swallowed his companion had been the aggressor in the fight. He had struck first. He had killed. In the heart of Polaris arose a terrible sense of outraged justice. This waif of the eternal snows became the law.

The stranger turned and saw him. He started violently, paled, and then an angry flush mounted to his temples and an angry glint came into his eyes. His crime had been witnessed, and by a strange white man.

His hand flew to his hip, and he swung a heavy revolver up and fired, speeding the bullet with a curse. He missed and would have fired again, but his hour had struck. With the precision of an automaton Polaris snatched one of his own pistols from the holster. He raised it above the level of his shoulder, and fired on the drop.

Not for nothing had he spent long hours practicing with his father's guns, sighting and pulling the trigger countless times, although they were empty. The man in front of him staggered, dropped his pistol, and reeled dizzily. A stream of blood gushed from his lips. He choked, clawed at the air, and pitched backward.

The chasm which had received his victim, received the murderer also.

Polaris heard a shrill scream to his right,

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CHAPTER III

POLARIS MAKES A PROMISE

BOTH stood transfixed for a long moment—the man with the wonder that followed his anger, the woman with horror. Polaris drew a deep breath and stepped a hesitating pace forward.

The woman threw out her hands in a gesture of loathing.

"Murderer!" she said in a low, deep voice, choked with grief. "Oh, my brother; my poor brother!" She threw herself on the snow, sobbing terribly.

Rooted to the spot by her repelling gesture, Polaris watched her. So one of the men had been her brother. Which one? His naturally clear mind began to reassert itself.

They took the snow-path to the east, with the skeleton of the Yedda flaming behind them

and turned swiftly on his heel, automatically swinging up his revolver to meet a new peril.

Another being stood on the brow of the ridge—stood with clasped hands and horror-stricken eyes. Clad almost the same as the others, there was yet a subtle difference which garments could not disguise.

Polaris leaned forward with his whole soul in his eyes. His hand fell to his side. He had made his second discovery. He had discovered woman!

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"Lady," he called softly. He did not attempt to go nearer to her.

She raised her face from her arms, crept to her knees, and stared at him stonily. "Well, murderer, finish your work," she said. "I am ready. Ah, what had he—what had they done that you should take their lives?"

"Listen to me, lady," said Polaris quietly. "You saw me—kill. Was that man your brother?"

The girl did not answer, but continued to gaze at him with horror-stricken eyes. Her mouth quivered pitifully.

"If that man was your brother, then I killed him, and with reason," pursued Polaris calmly. "If he was not, then of your brother's death, at least, I am guiltless. I did but punish his slayer."

"His *slayer!* What are you saying?" gasped the girl.

Polaris snapped open the breech of his revolver and emptied its cartridges into his hand. He took the other revolver from its holster and emptied it also. He laid the cartridge in his hand and extended it.

"See," he said, "there are twelve cartridges, but only one empty shell. Only two shots were fired—one by the man whom I killed, the other by me." He saw that he had her attention, and repeated his question: "Was that man your brother?"

"No," she answered.

"Then, you see, I could not have *shot* your brother," said Polaris. His face grew stern with the memory of the scene he had witnessed. "They quarreled, your brother and the other man. I came behind the drift yonder and saw them. I might have stopped them—but, lady, they were the first men I had ever seen, save only one. I was bound by surprise. The other man was the stronger. He struck your brother into the crevasse. He would have shot me, but my mind returned to me, and with anger at that which I saw, and I killed him.

"In proof, lady, see—the snow between me and the spot yonder where they stood is untracked. I have been no nearer."

Wonderingly the girl followed with her eyes and the direction of his pointing finger. She comprehended.

"I—I believe you have told me the truth," she faltered. "They *had* quarreled. But—but—you said they were the first men you had ever seen. How—what—"

Polaris crossed the intervening slope and stood at her side.

"That is a long tale, lady," he said simply. "You are in distress. I would help you. Let us go to your camp. Come."

The girl raised her eyes to his, and they gazed long at one another. Polaris saw a slender figure of nearly his own height. She was clad in heavy woolen garments. A hooded cap framed the long oval of her face.

The eyes that looked into his were steady and gray. Long eyes they were, delicately turned at the corners. Her nose was straight and high, its end titlted ever so slightly. Full, crimson lips and a firm little chin peeped over the collar of her jacket. A wisp of chestnut hair swept her high brow and added its tale to a face that would have been accounted beautiful in any land.

In the eyes of Polaris she was divinity.

The girl saw a young giant in the flower of his manhood. Clad in splendid white furs of fox and bear, with a necklace of teeth of the polar bear for adornment, he resembled those magnificent barbarians of the Northland's ancient sagas.

His yellow hair had grown long, and fel about his shoulders under his fox-skin cap. The clean-cut lines of his face scarce were shaded by its growth of red-gold beard an mustache. Except for the guns at his bel he might have been a young chief of vikings His countenance was at once eager, thoughtful, and determined.

Barbaric and strange as he seemed, the girl found in his face that which she might trust. She removed a mitten and extended a small, white hand to him. Falling on one knee in the snow, Polaris kissed it, with the grace of a knight of old doing homage to his lady fair.

The girl flashed him another wondering glance from her long, gray eyes that set all his senses tingling. Side by side they passed over the ridge.

Disaster had overtaken the camp which lay on the other side. Camp it was by courtesy only—a miserable shelter of blankets and robes, propped with pieces of broken sledge, a few utensils, the partially devoured carcass of a small seal, and a tiny fire, kindled from fragments of the sledge. In the snow some distance from the fire lay the stiffened bodies of several sledge dogs, sinister evidence of the hopelessness of the campers' position.

Polaris turned questioningly to the girl.

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"We were lost in the storm," she said. "We left the ship, meaning to be gone only a few hours, and then were lost in the blinding snow. That was three days ago. How many miles we wandered I do not know. The dogs became crazed and turned upon us. The men shot them. Oh, there seems so little hope in this terrible land!" She shuddered. "But you—where did you come from?"

"Do not lose heart, lady," replied Polaris. "Always, in every land, there is hope. There must be. I have lived here all my life. I have come up from the far south. I know but one path—the path to the north, to the world of men. Now I will fetch my sledge up, and then we shall talk and decide. We will find your ship. I, Polaris, promise you that."

He turned from her to the fire, and cast on its dying embers more fragments of the splintered sledge. His eyes shone. He muttered to himself: "A ship, a ship! Ah, but my father's God is good to his son!"

He set off across the snow slopes to bring up the pack.

CHAPTER IV

HURLED SOUTH AGAIN

WHEN his strong form had bounded from her view, the girl turned to the little hut and shut herself within. She cast herself on a heap of blankets, and gave way to her bereavement and terror.

Her brother's corpse was scarcely cold at the bottom of the abyss. She was lost in the trackless wastes—alone, save for this bizarre stranger who had come out of the snows, this man of strange sayings, who seemed a demigod of the wilderness.

Could she trust him? She must. She recalled him kneeling in the snow, and the courtierlike grace with which he kissed her hand. A hot flush mounted to her eyes. She dried her tears.

She heard him return to the camp, and heard the barking of the dogs. Once he passed near the hut, but he did not intrude, and she remained within.

Womanlike, she set about the rearrangement of her hair and clothing. When she had finished she crept to the doorway and peeped out. Again her blushes burned her cheeks. She saw the son of the snows crouched above the camp-fire, surrounded by a group of monstrous dogs. He had rubbed his face with oil. A bright blade glittered in his hand. Polaris was *shaving!*

Presently she went out. The young man sprang to his feet, cracking his long whip to restrain the dogs, which would have sprung upon the stranger. They huddled away, their teeth bared, staring at her with glowing eyes. Polaris seized one of them by the scruff of the neck, lifted it bodily from the snow, and swung it in front of the girl.

"Talk to him, lady," he said; "you must be friends. This is Julius."

The girl bent over and fearlessly stroked the brute's head.

"Julius, good dog," she said. At her touch the dog quivered and its hackles rose. Under the caress of her hand it quieted gradually. The bristling hair relaxed, and Julius's tail swung slowly to and fro in an overture of amity. When Polaris loosed him, he sniffed in friendly fashion at the girl's hands, and pushed his great head forward for more caresses.

Then Marcus, the grim leader of the pack, stalked majestically forward for his introduction.

"Ah, you have won Marcus!" cried Polaris. "And Marcus won is a friend indeed. None of them would harm you now." Soon she had learned the name and had the confidence of every dog of the pack, to the great delight of their master.

Among the effects in the camp was a small oil-stove, which Polaris greeted with brightened eyes. "One like that we had, but it was worn out long ago," he said. He lighted the stove and began the preparation of a meal.

She found that he had cleared the camp and put all in order. He had dragged the carcasses of the dead dogs to the other side of the slope and piled them there. His stock of meat was low, and his own dogs would have no qualms if it came to making their own meals off these strangers of their own kind.

The girl produced from the remnants of the camp stores a few handfuls of coffee and an urn. Polaris watched in wonderment as she brewed it over the tiny stove and his nose twitched in reception of its delicious aroma. They drank the steaming beverage, piping hot, from tin cups. In the stinging air of the snowlands even the keenest grief must give way to the pangs of hunger. The girl ate heartily of a meal that

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in a more moderate climate she would have considered fit only for beasts.

When their supper was completed they sat huddled in their furs at the edge of the fire. Around them were crouched the dogs, watching with eager eyes for any scraps which might fall to their share.

"Now tell me who you are, and how you came here," questioned the girl.

"Lady, my name is Polaris, and I think that I am an American gentleman," he said, and a trace of pride crept into the words of the answer. "I came here from a cabin and a ship that lie burned many leagues to the southward. All my life I have lived there, with but one companion, my father, who now is dead, and who sends me to the north with a message to that world of men that lies beyond the snows, and from which he long was absent."

"A ship—a cabin—" The girl bent toward him in amazement. "And burned? And you have lived—have grown up in this land of snow and ice and bitter cold, where but few things can exist—I don't understand!"

"My father has told me much, but not all. It is all in his message which I have not seen," Polaris answered. "But that which I tell you is truth. He was a seeker after new things. He came here to seek that which no other man had found. He came in a ship with my mother and others. All were dead before I came to knowledge. He had built a cabin from the ruins of the ship, and he lived there until he died."

"And you say that you are an American gentleman?"

"That he told me, lady, although I do not know my name or his, except that he was Stephen, and he called me Polaris."

"And did he never try to get to the north?" asked the girl.

"No. Many years ago, when I was a boy, he fell and was hurt. After that he could do but little. He could not travel."

"And you?"

"I learned to seek food in the wilderness, lady; to battle with its beasts, to wrest that which would sustain our lives from the snows and the wastes."

Much more of his life and of his father he told her under her wondering questioning—a tale most incredible to her ears, but, as he said, the truth. Finally he finished.

"Now, lady, what of you?" he asked. "How came you here, and from where?"

"My name is Rose—"

"Ah, that is the name of a flower," said Polaris. "You were well named."

He did not look at her as he spoke. His eyes were turned to the snow slopes and were very wistful. "I have never seen a flower," he continued slowly, "but my father said that of all created things they were the fairest."

"I have another name," said the girl. "It is Rose—Rose Emer."

"And why did you come here, Rose Emer?" asked Polaris.

"Like your father, I—we were seekers after new things, my brother and I. Both our father and mother died, and left my brother John and myself ridiculously rich. We had to use our money, so we traveled. We have been over most of the world. Then a man—an American gentleman—a very brave man, organized an expedition to come to the south to discover the south pole. My brother and I knew him. We were very much interested in his adventure. We helped him with it. Then John insisted that he would come with the expedition, and—oh, they didn't wish me to come, but I never had been left behind—I came, too."

"And that brave man who came to seek the pole, where is he now?"

"Perhaps he is dead—out there," said the girl, with a catch in her voice. She pointed to the south. "He left the ship and went on, days ago. He was to establish two camps with supplies. He carried an airship with him. He was to make his last dash for the pole through the air from the farther camp. His men were to wait for him until—until they were sure that he would not come back."

"An airship!" Polaris bent forward with sparkling eyes. "Se there *are* airships, then! Ah, this man must be brave! How is he called?"

"James Scoland is his name—Captain Scoland."

"He went on whence I came? Did he go by that way?" Polaris pointed where the white tops of the mountain range which he skirted pierced the sky.

"No. He took a course to the east of the mountains, where other explorers of years before had been before him."

"Yes, I have seen maps. Can you tell me where, or nearly where, we are now?" he asked the girl.

"This is Victoria Land," she answered. "We left the ship in a long bay, extending

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in from Ross Sea, near where the 160th meridian joins the 80th parallel. We are somewhere within three days' journey from the ship."

"And so near to open water?"

She nodded.

ROSE EMER slept in the little shelter, with the grim Marcus curled on a robe beside her pallet. Crouched among the dogs in the camp, Polaris slept little. For hours he sat huddled, with his chin on his hands, pondering what the girl had told him. Another man was on his way to the pole—a very brave man—and he might reach it. And then—Polaris must be very wary when he met that man who had won so great a prize.

"Ah, my father," he sighed, "learning is mine through patience. History of the world and of its wars and triumphs and failures, I know. Of its tongues you have taught me, even those of the Roman and the Greek, long since passed away; but how little do I know of the ways of men—and of women! I shall be very careful, my father."

Quite beyond any power of his to control, an antagonism was growing within him for that man whom he had not seen; antagonism that was not all due to the magnitude of the prize which the man might be winning, or might be dying for. Indeed, had he been able to analyze it, that was the least part of it.

When they broke camp for their start they found that the perverse wind, which had rested while they slept, had risen when they would journey, and hissed bitterly across the bleak steppes of snow. Polaris made a place on the sledge for the girl, and urged the pack into the teeth of the gale. All day long they battled ahead in it, bearing left to the west, where was more level pathway, than among the snow dunes.

In an ever increasing blast they came in sight of open water. They halted on a far-stretching field, much broken by huge masses, so snow-covered that it was not possible to know whether they were of rock or ice. Not a quarter of a mile beyond them, the edge of the field was fretted by wind-lashed waves, which extended away to the horizon rim, dotted with tossing icebergs of great height.

Polaris pitched camp in the shelter of a towering cliff, and they made themselves what comfort they could in the stinging cold.

They had slept several hours when the slumbers of Polaris were pierced by a woman's screams, the frenzied howling of the dogs, and the thundering reverberations of grinding and crashing ice cliffs. A dash of spray splashed across his face.

He sprang to his feet in the midst of the leaping pack; as he did so he felt the field beneath him sway and pitch like a hammock. For the first time since he started for the north the Antarctic sun was shining brightly—shining cold and clear on a great disaster!

For they had pitched their camp on an ice floe. Whipped on by the gale, the sea had risen under it, heaved it up and broken it. On a section of the floe several acres in extent their little camp lay, at the very brink of a gash in the ice-field which had cut them off from the land over which they had come.

The water was raging like a millrace through the widening rift between them and the shore. Caught in a swift current and urged by the furious wind, the broken-up floe was drifting, faster and faster—*back to the south!*

CHAPTER V

BATTLE ON THE FLOE

HELPLESS, Polaris stood at the brink of the rift, swirling water and tossing ice throwing the spray about him in clouds. Here was opposition against which his naked strength was useless. As if they realized that they were being parted from the firm land, the dogs grouped at the edge of the floe and sent their dismal howls across the raging swirl, only to be drowned by the din of the crashing icebergs.

Turning, Polaris saw Rose Emer. She stood at the doorway of the tent of skins, staring across the wind-swept channel with a blank despair looking from her eyes.

"Ah, all is lost, now!" she gasped.

Then the great spirit of the man rose into spoken words. "No, lady," he called, his voice rising clearly above the shrieking and thundering pandemonium. "We yet have our lives."

As he spoke there was a rending sound at his feet. The dogs sprang back in terror and huddled against the face of the ice cliff. Torn away by the impact of some weightier body beneath, nearly half of the ledge where

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they stood was split from the main body of the floe, and plunged, heaving and crackling into the current.

Polaris saved himself by a mighty spring. Right in the path of the gash lay the sledge, and it hung balanced at the edge of the ice floe. Down it swung, and would have slipped over, but Polaris saw it going.

He clutched at the ends of the leathern dog-harness as they glided from him across the ice and, with a tug, into which he put all the power of his splendid muscles, he retrieved the sledge. Hardly had he dragged it to safety when, with another roar of sundered ice, their foothold gaped again and left them but a scanty shelf at the foot of the beetling berg.

"Here we may not stay, lady," said Polaris. He swept the tent and its robes into his arms and piled them on the sledge. Without waiting to harness the dogs, he grasped the leather bands and alone pulled the load along the ledge and around a shoulder of the cliff.

At the other side of the cliff a ridge extended between the berg which they skirted and another towering mountain of ice of similar formation. Beyond the twin bergs lay the level plane of the floe, its edges continually frayed by the attack of the waves and the onset of floating ice.

Along the incline of the ridge were several hollows partially filled with drift snow. Knowing that on the ice cape, in such a tempest, they must soon perish miserably, Polaris made camp in one of these depressions where the deep snow tempered the chill of its foundation.

In the clutch of the churning waters the floe turned slowly like an immense wheel as it drifted in the current. Its course was away from the shore to the southwest, and it gathered speed and momentum with every passing second. The cove from whence it had been torn was already a mere notch in the faraway shore line.

Around them was a scene of wild and compelling beauty. Leagues and leagues of on-rushing water hurled its white-crested squadrons against the precipitous sides of the flotilla of icebergs, tore at the edges of the drifting floes, and threw itself in huge waves across the more level planes, inundating them repeatedly. Clouds of lacelike spray hung in the air after each attack, and cascading torrents returned to the waves.

Above it all the antarctic sun shone gloriously, splintering its golden spears on the myriad pinnacles, minarets, battlements, and crags of towering masses of crystal that reflected back into the quivering air all the colors of the spectrum. Thinner crests blazed flame-red in the rays. Other points glittered coldly blue. From a thousand lesser scintillating spires the shifting play of the colors, from vermilion to purple, from green to gold, in the lavish magnificence of nature's magic, was torture to the eye that beheld.

On the spine of the ridge stood Polaris, leaning on his long spear and gazing with heightened color and gleaming eyes on those fairy symbols of old mother nature. To the girl who watched him he seemed to complete the picture. In his superb trappings of furs, and surrounded by his shaggy servants, he was at one with his weird and terrible surroundings. She admired—and shuddered.

Presently, when he came down from the ridge, she asked him, with a brave smile, "What, sir, will be the next move?"

"That is, in the hands of the great God, if such a one there be," he said. "Whatever it may be, it shall find us ready. Somewhere we must come to shore. When we do —on to the north and the ship, be it half a world away."

"But for food and warmth? We must have those, if we are to go in the flesh."

"Already they are provided for," he replied quickly. He was peering sharply over her shoulder toward the mass of the other berg. With his words the clustered pack set up an angry snarling and baying. She followed his glance and paled.

Lumbering forth from a narrow pass at the extremity of the ridge was a gigantic polar bear. His little eyes glittered wickedly, hungrily, and his long, red tongue crept out and licked his slavering chops. As he came on, with ungainly, padding gait, his head swung ponderously to and fro.

Scarcely had he cleared the pass of his immense bulk when another twitching white muzzle was protruded, and a second beast, in size nearly equal to the first, set foot on the ridge and ambled on to the attack.

Reckless at least of this peril, the dogs would have leaped forward to close with the invaders but their master intervened. The stinging, cracking lash in his hand drove them from the foe. Their overlord, man, elected to make the battle alone.

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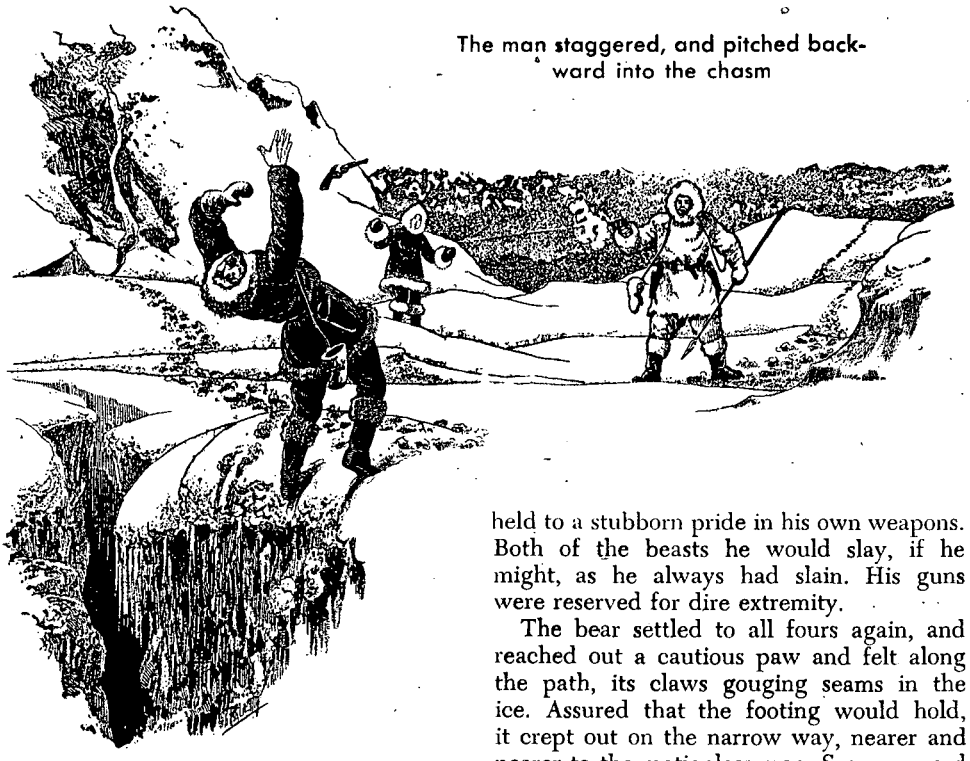

The man staggered, and pitched backward into the chasm

In two springs he reached the sledge, tore the rifle from its coverings, and was at the side of the girl. He thrust the weapon into her hands.

"Back, lady; back to the sledge!" he cried. "Unless I call, shoot not. If you do shoot, aim for the throat when they rear, and leave the rest to me and the dogs. Many times have I met these enemies, and I know well how to deal with them."

With another crack of the whip over the heads of the snarling pack, he left her and bounded forward, spear in hand and long knife bared.

Awkward of pace and unhurried, the snow kings came on to their feast. In a thought the man chose his ground. Between him and the bears the ridge narrowed so that for a few feet there was footway for but one of the monsters at once.

Polaris ran to where that narrow path began and threw himself on his face on the ice.

At that ruse the foremost bear hesitated. He reared and brushed his muzzle with his formidable crescent-clawed paw. Polaris might have shot then and ended at once the hardest part of his battle. But the man held to a stubborn pride in his own weapons. Both of the beasts he would slay, if he might, as he always had slain. His guns were reserved for dire extremity.

The bear settled to all fours again, and reached out a cautious paw and felt along the path, its claws gouging seams in the ice. Assured that the footing would hold, it crept out on the narrow way, nearer and nearer to the motionless man. Scarce a yard from him it squatted. The steam of its breath beat toward him.

It raised one armed paw to strike. The girl cried out in terror and raised the rifle. The man moved, and she hesitated.

Down came the terrible paw, its curved claws projected and compressed for the blow. It struck only the adamantine ice of the pathway, splintering it. With the down stroke timed to the second, the man had leaped up and forward.

As though set on a steel spring, he vaulted into the air, above the clashing talons and gnashing jaws, and landed light and sure on the back of his ponderous adversary. To pass an arm under the bear's throat, to clip its back with the grip of his legs was the work of a heart-beat's time for Polaris.

With a stifled howl of rage the bear rose to its haunches, and the man rose with it. He gave it no time to turn or settle. Exerting his muscles of steel, he tugged the huge head back. He swung clear from the body of his foe. His feet touched the path and held it. He shot one knee into the back of the bear.

The spear he had dropped when he sprang, but his long knife gleamed in his

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hand, and he stabbed, once, twice, sending the blade home under the brute's shoulder. He realeased his grip, spurned the yielding body with his foot, and the huge hulk rolled from the path down the slope, crimsoning the snow with its blood.

Polaris bounded across the narrow ledge and regained his spear. He smiled as there arose from the foot of the slope a hideous clamor that told him that the pack had charged in, as usual, not to be restrained at sight of the kill. He waved his hand to the girl, who stood, statuelike, beside the sledge.

Doubly enraged at its inability to participate in the battle which had been the death of its mate, the smaller bear waited no longer when the path was clear, but rushed madly with lowered head. Strong as he was, the man knew that he could not hope to stay or turn that avalanche of flesh and sinew. As it reached him he sprang aside where the path broadened, lashing out with his keen-edged spear.

His aim was true. Just over one of the small eyes the point of the spear bit deep, and blood followed it. With tigerish agility the man leaped over the beast, striking down as he did so.

The bear reared on its hindquarters and whimpered, brushing at its eyes with its forepaws. Its head gashed so that the flowing blood blinded it, it was beaten. Before it stood its master. Bending back until his body arched like a drawn bow, Polaris poised his spear and thrust home at the broad chest.

A death howl that was echoed back from the crashing cliffs was answer to his stroke. The bear settled forward and sprawled in the snow.

Polaris set his foot on the body of the fallen monster and gazed down at the girl with smiling face.

"Here, lady, are food and warmth for many days," he called.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE UNKNOWN

SOUTHWARD, ever southward, the floating glory of the jeweled tide bore them. Fast as they went, the wind-urged waters raced by them faster still. Steel-blue surges, mountain high, tore by their refuge in endless rush. From a sky gale-swept of all clouds, the sun shone steadily through nightless days.

Fragment after fragment of the drifting floe was rasped away and ground to splinters among the staggering icebergs. As it dwindled in dimensions, its revolving movement increased, until it reeled onward like a giant gyroscope, and they who rode it grew giddy with its whirl.

Around them nature played her heart-shaking music, and spread over glittering tide and snow-splashed icebergs the wondrous, iridescent filaments reflected from the facets of her monstrous gems.

Then, as suddenly as it had risen, the wind died away. Cloudheads arose and overcast the sky, the ragged waves smoothed into long rollers, and their frightful pace was abated, although they continued to ride south with a strong tide.

A few hours later it seemed that the wind had been to the end of the world and had turned to hurry northward again, for it began to beat up steadily from ahead of them, but not strongly enough to overcome the tide it had set with it in its headlong dash.

To their left, far away, they could catch occasional glimpses of a jagged coast-line. Out to the right little was to be seen but the tossing flotilla of bergs, gradually fretting away into tide ice.

With the return of the wind from the south, Polaris was puzzled to note once more the recurrence of a phenomenon over which he had pondered often. The air was growing warmer!

Another manifestation came; more puzzling by far than that of the warming breeze. One day they awoke and found the air filled with drifting white particles. As far as the eye could see it seemed that a shower of fine snow was falling. But the storm was not of snow!

Settling weblike in the crannies of the ice, filming the crests of the waves, hanging impalpably in the breeze, it was ashes that was falling!

Whence came this strangest of all storms? Polaris and Rose Emer stared at each other, completely at a loss.

"If we are to go far enough, we are to find out some great new thing, lady," said the man.

SOON after the battle with the bears they had abandoned the first iceberg. The floe had broken away on that side until the

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berg's sheer side was opposed to the fury of the wind and waves, and Polaris feared that it would topple under the constant impact with other bergs, and pitch them into the tide.

They crossed the narrow path to the twin berg, threaded the pass of the bears, and found on the farther side a cavern in the ice, partly filled with drift snow, where the animals had made their lair. There they were now confined, as in a castle. The plane of the floe had all been beaten away. Even the ridge between the bergs was gone, and the waves rolled between the twin towers of ice, still held together beneath the surface of the waters by a bond that no crash had severed.

The wind subsided, but the air remained warm. No longer were they within the realm of eternal ice, for, outside their prison, the surfaces of the revolving bergs at times actually dripped. The ice was thawing!

Then a kink in the current caught them and shot them straight to shore. From the crest of their watchtower, Polaris and the girl viewed the approach. Along the shoreline for miles the drift ice lay like a scum on the water, with here and there the remnant of a mighty iceberg jutting up. Of those, their own refuge was the largest remaining.

Beyond the drift ice the land seemed covered with heavy snow, and far inland were hills. To the northward, perhaps a mile, a mountain range that seemed like a mighty wall curved from the horizon to the lap of the sea, and terminated at the water's edge in a sheer and gleaming face, many hundred feet high. Just ahead a promontory extended out toward them, and beyond it lay a cove. The heavens to the southward were piled with dull cloud-banks that curled and shifted in the slow wind.

"It may be that this will be a rough landing, lady," said Polaris. "Our tower is going to pieces, and here we may not stay. I will make ready the sledge. We must cross the drift ice to the shore in some manner."

He packed their stores on the sledge, with the robes and all that made their little camp, and hauled everything to what seemed the most solid portion of the berg. Instinctive seemed the wisdom that guided the man. The twin bergs, driven on by the last impulse of the current, plowed through the drift ice like a stately ship, and were broken asunder across the point of the promontory. Their revolutions laid them right across the snow-covered point of land.

As they swung on, the berg which they had quitted was southernmost. There was a dull shock of impact, and beneath their feet the solid ice quivered. The farther berg pushed on around the point in a swirl of foam and ice. Their own ice castle swung to the north side of the promontory, keeled over at a terrifying angle, and began to settle.

Above them loomed the beetling masses of ice with the dark shadow of the cave mouth. Below was the nose of the promontory, covered deep with snow. Farther and farther leaned the berg.

"We have but a moment!" cried Polaris. "We must leap. The berg will fall on the land or slide into the sea. It is turning over!"

He seized the sledge, half lifted it, and hurled it from the tilting berg into the snow. Then he caught the girl in his arms and leaped, putting all his strength into the jump.

Out into the air they shot, and down, down. Around them as they fell the sky seemed to be showering dogs as the seven of the pack followed their master. Then man and girl and dogs vanished in the soft snow, and the iceberg went thundering and crashing to its fall.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT MANNER OF MEN?

BURIED many feet in the snow, with the struggling mass of dogs above and around them, Polaris and Rose Emer heard the muffled shock of the mighty crag and felt the rock beneath them vibrate. Masses of ice hurtled through the air and fell in the snow all about them, but they were unscathed.

When they floundered with much effort to the surface of the snow the crystal cliff that had been their home was gone. The waves were tossing and eddying where it had plunged over. Where it had ground the side of the point snow and ice had been torn away, leaving exposed the naked gray rocks. Around the head of the promontory drifted a long, low mass of yellow ice, water-worn and unlovely, that had been the bottom of the berg.

About them the snow was crusted, and the crust was punctured with many pits

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where fragments of the ice from the berg had fallen, and with other pits where the seven dogs of the pack had pitched headlong. One by one the gray runners crawled to the surface and emerged like rats from their holes to sprawl upon the snow crust, looking exceedingly foolish, as is the manner of dignified dogs when they are spilled promiscuously into such a predicament.

A little way from where the man and woman stood the sledge was upended in the drift. If walked over quickly the crust of the snow was firm enough to offer footing.

Polaris soon righted the sledge, which had suffered no harm in its fall, and inspanned the team. They set off for the shore over a succession of dips and rises along the back of the promontory.

Where it was joined to the shore, however, they found an obstacle. The land bristled with a bulwark of rocks, snow, and ice of a height to make it impossible for the man to guide the sledge over it.

Rose Emer had come to look to Polaris in the face of each new difficulty, finding in him an infinite resource and genius for surmounting them. She turned to him now, and found that he had solved the puzzle.

"We can scramble over this," he said; "you and I and the dogs, and we will find a spot suitable for landing the sledge along the shore. Then I will return and manage with the sledge across the drift ice. It is wedged in the cove yonder so firmly that it will be no great task."

The girl glanced down into the cove, where the glittering scum of fragments rose and fell with the swell of the waves, and her eyes widened; but she offered no objection. She had yet to see this man fail in what he attempted.

Using his spear for an alpenstock, Polaris took her by the arm, and they made the ascent of the rocks. Sometimes he lifted her as lightly as though she were a babe and set her ahead of him, while he climbed to a farther projection of the crags. Sometimes he carried her bodily in one arm and climbed on easily with the double weight.

So they reached the far side of the obstruction, and after them scrambled and leaped the pack.

To the east a plain stretched away toward the hills and the mountain wall—a plain rifted deeply with many gulleys and chasms, but passable. They found with little difficulty a break in the rocky rampart that fringed the bank of the cove where the sledge might be landed, and there Polaris left the girl and the dogs. He leaped onto the drift ice with a wave of his hand and set out across the cove for the point, marking as he went the safest and easiest course for his return with the sledge.

Rose Emer watched him cross and ascend the sloping side of the point. A moment later he reappeared, dragging the sledge, and launched it on the return trip. He disdained to lighten the load of it, in which manner he might have made his transport much more easily in two journeys.

Leaping from one large cake of ice to another, he hauled and pushed and dragged the entire load. Where dangerous intervals of small ice lay between the larger pieces, he crossed over, and with a heave of his magnificent shoulders pulled the sledge quickly across. What ten men might well have hesitated to attempt he accomplished with seeming ease.

He was more than half-way across the cove when the attention of the girl was distracted from him by a disturbance of the ice near the cove's mouth. Where there had been little motion of the drift ice she saw several of the fragments pitched suddenly from the water, and as they fell back she thought she glimpsed beneath them in the water the passing of a large, dark body.

As she wondered the ice was thrown violently aside in half a dozen places, and in the eddying water she saw the rudderlike fins and lashing tails of a school of some sort of monsters of the sea. They were headed in the direction of the laboring man.

She called a warning to him, but in the midst of the grinding of the drift and the noise of his own exertions he did not hear it. With no warning the danger was upon him.

He had dragged the sledge to the center of one of the larger cakes of ice, and paused to select his next objective. There was a rush in the water under the ice, the drift was parted suddenly, and a monstrous head with open mouth and a terrifying array of gleaming tusks rose dripping from the gap.

Over the edge of the man's floating footing this dread apparition was projected, a full eight feet of head and giant body thrust out of the sea in an attempt to wriggle onto the ice cake. The big flake of ice, perhaps fifteen feet across, titlted from the water under the weight of the monster, and it

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seemed that the man and sledge would be pitched straight into the yawning maw.

Then, with a clash of disappointed jaws, the head was withdrawn, the monster sank from sight, and the ice raft righted.

Rose Emer sank on her knees in the snow. Around her crouched the dogs, yelping, baying in fury at the sight of the diving danger. "Ah, Heaven help him!" she gasped. "The killer-whales!"

SUCH were the monsters which beset Polaris. All around the piece of ice on which he floated with the sledge the smaller drift was thrashed by their plunging bodies. Again and again they thrust their frightful snouts above the surface and strove to hurl themselves onto the ice cake. Some of them were more than twenty feet in length.

When the first hideous head appeared from the deep and nearly overturned his float Polaris stood as if frozen, staring at it in amazement. Such a thing he had never seen. He crouched on the ice and tightened his grip on his long spear. When he saw the number of his enemies he realized the futility of an attempt at battle with such weapons as he bore.

Immediately he became alert to outwit them. With his agility he might have essayed to cross the ice and elude them safely were he unhampered by the unwieldy sledge, but not for an instant did he consider abandoning it.

In a glance he picked out the next resting-spot, some feet distant across the drift. He pushed the sledge almost to the edge at one side of the cake, and sprang to the other side, halting on the brink and bracing himself, with his spear-blade dug deeply into the ice.

There was a rushing and thrashing of huge bodies as the killers piled over one another in their eagerness to reach their prey. Several frightful heads were thrust from the water, their dripping jaws snapping within a few feet of the intrepid man. Quick as light he dashed across the ice cake, snatched up the ends of the long harness, and crossed the drift to the next large fragment. Watching his chances, he yanked the sledge across to him.

A dozen times he repeated his tactics successfully and worked in near to shore. If he could accomplish his ruse once more he would win through; he would be above water so shallow that even the bold killers would not dare to follow him for fear of being stranded there. But nearer to the landing the drift had been ground finer, and there was not between him and the shore another large piece. There he made a stand and considered.

He heard the voice of the girl calling to him.

"Shoot!" she cried. "Shoot and wound one of them! If you maim it badly the others will turn and attack it. Then you can get away!"

Polaris tossed his arm in sign that he had heard, and drew from their holsters his brace of heavy revolvers. He had but an instant to wait. One of the savage killers reared his immense and ugly snout from the waters less than a rod away. Polaris fired both guns straight into the gaping jaws.

That was nearly his undoing, for so mighty a plunge did the scathed and frightened monster give that it shot nearly the whole of its ponderous body across the edge of the ice where the man stood and cracked the cake clean in two. Then it sank into the water, convulsively opening and closing its jaws, as if it would eject the stinging pellets which it had received. The water was dyed red around it.

In a trice the band of killers, which had dived at the report of the shots, surrounded their wounded comrade, and the carnage began. All thought of the man on the ice was abandoned for the moment as they rent in fragments and devoured one of their own kind. Above their horrid feasting the waves foamed crimson.

WHEN he saw how things were faring below him the man lost not a moment in crossing the remaining drift, dragging the sledge to the shore.

He turned and saw the baffled killers flock sullenly off to sea, whipping the drift contemptuously from their wake with lashing tails.

"Rose Emer, I thank you," he said simply. "I was hard put to it to know how to save the sledge, and you told me the right thing to do."

She smiled admiringly. A savage apparition to be feared; an instrument of deliverance sent by Providence; a friend and comrade to be admired and trusted—all of these things in turn had Polaris been to her. She found him a man wonderful in all his ways—a child of the vast chaos, yet gentle,

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fierce and fearless in the face of peril, but possessed of a natural courtesy as unfailing as it was untaught—savage, savior, friend. Was he not becoming more than a friend—or was it all a glamour of the snows and seas and dangers which would fade and thrill no more when she returned to the things of every day?

Eager to be on the march after the days of enforced inactivity, they set off at once for the base of the mountain wall to the north, hoping that somewhere in its curving length they might find a pass or a notch in its face through which they might win the path to the far-away ship.

Under the cracking lash of the Southlander the dogs ran fast and true; but ever the mighty wall of the mountains stretched on, unbroken by notch or crevice, its side gleaming with the smooth ice of many thawing torrents that had frozen and frozen again until it was like a giant's slide.

If a man had many weeks to spare to the task he might cross it, cutting his steps laboriously one by one. For them, with their dogs and sledge, it was impassable.

The curve of the range pushed them relentlessly farther to the south as they went on to the south where far away across the plains lay other hills, above which cloud masses curled and drifted always.

On their third day's journey inland they found that which altered all the course of their wanderings, and led them on to great new things. They crossed the trail of the unknown.

Swiftly the seven gray coursers of the snows were speeding, noses down and plumed tails awave in the breeze of their going. The girl sat on the sledge, and beside it the man raced, light of foot as the dogs, and never tiring.

Then, in the midst of his stride, Marcus, the leader, set his four feet hard on the snow crust and slid on his hams, the six others piling up at his back in confusion with sharp yelps of consternation. Over the tangle of the pack whined and cracked the long whip of Polaris, and cracked and whined vainly. Marcus would not budge. He lifted his gray muzzle in a weird howl of protest and bewilderment, and the hair along his spine bristled.

Behind him Octavius, Julius, Nero, and Hector took up the cry of astonishment, and the mellower notes of Pallas and Juno chimed in.

Polaris straightened out, like the good driver that he was, the sad kinks in the harness and ran forward; but he had gone but a few paces when he, too, stopped in the snow, and stood staring ahead and down.

They were at the brink of a trail!

There it lay, stretching from somewhere near the base of the mountains, away across the great plains—a broad, recently traveled path, with footprints plain upon the snow—*the footprints of men!*

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRANGER

POLARIS stood so long at the lip of the strange path that Rose Emer uncurled from her seat on the sledge and ran forward to see what held him.

"A path—in this wilderness!" she cried in wonder. And then: "Why, we must be near to one of Captain Scoland's stations. Our troubles are nearly at an end."

"No, lady; I think these tracks lead to no station of your captain's, and our troubles may be just begun. Here are the tracks of many men—"

"But they must be those of our men," returned Rose Emer, "for who else could have made them?"

Polaris stepped into the trail and examined it with keen eyes.

"Lady, did they of your company dress their feet as do you or as I do?" he asked, pointing to his moccasins of bearskin.

"Why, they wore heavy boots of felt, with an overshoe of leather, spiked with steel," said the girl.

"And did they have with them any beasts other than the dogs of which you have told me?" queried Polaris.

Rose Emer shook her head. "No, they had only the dogs," she replied. "What tracks are there?"

Polaris arose from his examination of the trail. "Now, of all the strange things we have met by land and by sea, I account this the strangest of all," he said. "Here are the footprints of many men whose feet were clad as are my own, and with them the marks of a heavy sledge and the tracks of four-footed animals new to me—unless, indeed, they be those of dogs in boots—"

"What? Show me where!" Rose Emer knelt beside him to stare at the medley of

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footprints. She looked up at him wide-eyed a moment later.

"Why, this is impossible!" she gasped. "And yet—what *can* it mean? Those are the hoofprints of unshod horses!"

Polaris smiled down at her. "Remember the showers of ashes, Rose Emer; and that I told you that we were to learn some great new thing if we won safe to shore," he said. "Now are we at its gates. Stay—something glimmers yonder in the trail!"

He strode away, and returned shortly, bearing something that he had plucked from the snow.

"Bore any man in your company aught like this?" he asked, and held out to her a long, slender-bladed knife.

Wider grew the eyes of the girl in wonder as she took the weapon from him and looked at it. It was of one piece, both blade and shaft, nicely balanced and exquisitely wrought; but it was of no metal which the girl had ever seen. Only in the finest of iridescent glass had she ever seen the bewildering play of colors that was reflected from its bright blade when the sunlight fell on it. It was nearly a foot long, needle-pointed and razor-keen.

From the glittering dagger to the man's face the girl looked slowly. "There is no

His long knife gleamed as he stabbed the brute again and again under its massive shoulder

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metal known in the world to-day like that from which this knife is made," said she. "Who and what are they who dropped it here? And here, there are letters on the blade. They look like Greek."

She pointed to a beautifully clear inscription running down the blade. It read as follows:

ΟΧΑΛΚΕΥΣΚΑΡΔΕΠΟΙΗΜΕ

Polaris took the knife quickly and read where the girl pointed.

"A strange thing in a strange land," he said. "The words *are* Greek. They read: '*Ho chalkeus Kard epoié me*'—'Kard the Smith made me.'"

In the midst of her amazement at their discovery the girl marveled again at the living wonder who stood before them—a man who had survived in this awful wilderness, and who had there acquired through the patience of his father an education superior to her own, with all her advantages. For Polaris spoke and read Greek and something of Latin, besides being conversant with several of the languages of the modern world.

"Now we must make choice," he said. "Shall we cross this path and go on, seeking a pass in the mountains? Shall we follow it back whither it came from, or shall we follow on whither it leads, and asked of them who made it if there be a way to the north that we may take?"

"Polaris," she answered, and the heart of the man thrilled to the answer, for it was the first time he had heard his name on her lips, "it must be as you think best. In these places I am helpless, and you are the master. We will do whatever you think for the best."

"No, lady; in no way am I the master," he replied quickly. "I do but wish to serve you. Perhaps it were better to go on alone. And then, perhaps again, it were much time and wandering saved to find these folk and ask them of the ways. It may be that they, too, have a ship and are on the trail of the great pole, although something seems to tell me that such is not so."

"You mean that you think they *live here?*" asked the girl.

Polaris inclined his head. "Yes, lady, and I am curious to see what manner of men they may be, they who drive horses across the snows and leave knives of unknown metal to mark their trail. Now it is for you to say."

THE end of it was that they turned south on the trail of the strange people, and as they went they wondered much who Kard the Smith might be, who stamped his wares with ancient Greek inscriptions, yet who did not shoe his horses—or ponies, for the hoofprints were very small.

It was only after some urging that Polaris persuaded the pack to take the path. When they did he let them out to their speed, for the going was plain, and he had no fear of accident in a road travelled by so many. Straight on the trail led them toward the cloud-tipped mountain cluster that lay dim to the south.

As they traveled other circumstances arose to puzzle them. Once a flight of strange birds passed far above them, flying in the same direction. They came to a spot where the strangers had made camp, and there were the remains of a fire *with charred wood.* Then as they drew nearer, with many miles passed, they saw that the haze which hung about the mountain summits appeared to be not of clouds, but of smoke.

On the second stage of their journey Polaris halted the dogs at a new wonder.

"Lady," he said, "look hard and tell me the color of those hills, or is it that my eyes are giving way to the snow blindness?"

Rose Emer arose in the sledge and gazed at the hills, and cried: "Green! Green! But how *can* they be?"

"Warm air, green hills, and people with horses," Polaris smiled. "It seems that such are not all in the north. Ah, the good green hills I have read of and which I have so longed to see!"

On sped the dogs, and nearer and nearer loomed the hills of green, set like immense, dull emeralds in the white of the snows. Only at their summits were they black and craggy and scarred. Above them spiraled shifting clouds of smoke.

And as they journeyed, the sun shining on the softening snows, and the air growing warmer and warmer, in an ice-locked sound five hundred miles to the north, a little company of weary-faced men gathered on the deck of the good ship Felix, and one of their number read the burial service for the repose of Rose and John Emer and Homer

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Burleson, strayed from the ship and given up for dead after a searching party had failed to find any trace of them.

As the travelers neared the base of the foot-hills of the mountain range the ground became more uneven, being broken by rock slopes and small hills, many of which were bare of snow. Around these the trail wound zigzag. They swung around one of the sharp curves, and Polaris reined in the dogs.

"Now, lady, here comes one along the trail who may solve for us all our riddles!" he cried, and pointed ahead.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF TWENTY MOONS

NOT a quarter of a mile from them a man was running along the snow road toward them—a tall man, and well formed. He ran, or trotted slowly, with head bent, and many a sidewise glance along the borders of the trail.

"Now, I think that here is the owner of the knife come to seek it," muttered Polaris; and seeing that the stranger bore a spear, he reached his own long weapon from the sledge, and leaned on it as he watched the approach of the runner, the same quiet smile on his face with which he greeted all wonders.

Not until he was within a hundred yards of the sledge did the man see them. He came on fearlessly.

He was a swarthy fellow, black of beard, with a strong, high-featured visage, straight nose, and prominent cheek-bones. His hair hung from beneath a pointed cap of coarse, gray cloth, and was cropped at his collar. A tunic of brown material reached to his knees, and was clasped in front with several buckles. His feet were shod with high, furred moccasin-boots, which reached nearly to his knees, and which were bound with cross-strings. Above them were tight-fitting breeches of the same material as the tunic.

In a broad leather belt swung a small ax, a pair of large fur gloves, and an empty sheath. Ax-blade and buckles and the tip of his long, straight spear were all of the same iridescent metal as the dagger which Polaris had found in the snow. He was about forty years old.

When within a short spear-throw, he stood gazing at them, his eyes roving from man to girl, and from dogs to sledge, taking note of all. Then he spoke, in a deep and not unpleasant voice. Rose Emer understood a question in his inflection, but the language he spoke was unknown to her.

Polaris laughed and said quickly: "As it is written on the blade of the knife, so does he speak, Lady. It is Greek."

She looked from him to the stranger, wide-eyed. "What does he say?"

"He says, 'Whence come you?' and now I will answer him as best I can manage his tongue."

He turned to the strange man and lifted his voice. "We come from the north," he said.

"And who may you be," he queried the man, "who come down from the white north, through the lands where no man may travel, you who are like a child of the great sun, and who drive strange animals, the like of which were never seen?" and he pointed to the crouching dogs. "And who is she, the woman, who hath the aspect of a princess, and who rideth with thee across the snows?"

"Polaris am I named—Polaris of the Snows and she who is with me is Rose Emer, of America, and I am her servant. Now, who art thou, and how called?"

The man heard him with close attention. "I should judge thee little likely to be servant to any, thou Polaris of the Snows," he answered with a slow smile. "Part of thy words I comprehend not, but I name myself Kard the Smith, of the city of Sardanes."

"If thou are Kard the Smith, I have that which is thine," said Polaris, and he stepped forward and held out the dagger. "It bears thy name."

Kard took the weapon from him with a gesture of pleasure. "Not my name, O stranger of the snows," he said, "but that of my grandsire, Kard the Smith, three times removed, who did forge it. For that reason do I value it so highly that I came alone on the Hunters' Road willing to travel many weary miles and risk much to regain it."

"Is this that thou speakest thine only tongue, Kard the Smith?" pursued Polaris.

Kard nodded, and his eyes opened wide. "Yes, surely. And thou, who speakest it also, yet strangely, hast thou another?"

"Yes," said Polaris, "and thy language, I have been taught, is dead in the great world these many centuries. Who are thy

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people, and where is the city of Sardanes?"

"The great world!" repeated Kard. "The great world to the north, across the snows! Aye, thy coming thence proves the tales of the priests and historians of Sardanes, which, in truth, many of us had come to doubt. To us, Sardanes and the wastes are all of the world.

"The city lieth yonder," and he pointed over his shoulder toward the smoking mountains. "Know thou, Polaris of the snows, that thou and thy princess are the first of all strangers to come to Sardanes; and now do I, Kard the Smith, bid thee a fair welcome."

He bowed low to Rose Emer and to Polaris, sweeping the snow with his rough cap.

TRANSLATING the outcome of his conversation with the stranger to Rose Emer, Polaris started the team along the trail, and with Kard trotting alongside the sledge, they set out for the mysterious city which he said lay beyond the mountains.

As they went, Polaris gathered from Kard that the people of Sardanes had lived in their land a very great while, indeed; that their population numbered some two thousand souls, and that they were ruled by a hereditary king or prince.

"For the rest, thou shalt learn it of the priests, who are more learned than I," said Kard; "and thine own tale of marvels, beside which ours is but a little thing, though I starve from desire to hear it, thou shalt reserve for the ears of the Prince Helicon. It were meet that he hear it first of all in Sardanes."

In an atmosphere that grew momentarily more temperate, they drew near to the green bulk of the mountains.

"What maketh the warmth of this land?" called Polaris to Kard.

The Smith raised his hand and pointed to the summits above them, where the great smoke clouds hung heavily in the quiet air.

"Within the bowels of the hills are the undying fires which have burned from the first," he said. "They have saved the land from the wastes. No matter how the storms rage on the snow plains, it is ever warm in Sardanes. The city lieth in a valley, ringed round by a score of fire mountains, set there by the gods when the world began. And when the season of the great darkness falleth, the flare of the eternal flames lighteth the valley. With the light of twenty moons is Sardanes ever lighted. Wait and thou shalt see."

Presently they came to the foot of the range. For a short distance above them lay snow in patches on the slopes, and beyond that extended a wide belt of grasses and trees. Still higher, all vegetation ceased, and the earth was bare and brown, and the rocks were naked.

Above all jutted the fire blackened crags of the summits, wild and bleak. Just ahead of them yawned a pass, which some vast upheaval had torn in the base of the range in the long ago.

"Now must the lady walk with us," said Kard, "for the way is rough, and the lack of snow will make it difficult for the animals to drag on the sledge."

He spoke truly. So rough was the way in places that Polaris must add his own strength to the pull of the dogs. Kard the Smith would willingly have aided also, but the dogs would not permit him to lay hand on the traces, nor could Polaris prevail on them to be friendly with the man.

Up and up they climbed the many turns of the pass, its seamed walls of rock beetling above them at both sides. So warm was it that Polaris, sweating and pulling with the pack, took off his cloak and inner coat of bearskin, and struggled on in his under garment of seal fur.

They came to the peak of the pass, and again it wound irregularly downward for a space. Its sides were less precipitous. Long grasses and shrubbery grew in the niches of the rocks, and the light of the sun penetrated nearly to the path.

"Ah, see, Polaris," cried Rose Emer, "there, in the rocks, my namesake is nodding to me. A rose, and in this land!"

In a cleft in the rock wall clung a brier, and on it bloomed a single magnificent red blossom. After the weeks of hardship and grief and journeying with death, the sight of the flower brought tears to the eyes of the girl.

While Kard stood and smiled, Polaris stopped the team. He clambered up the rocks, clinging with his hands, and brought it down, its delicate perfume thrilling his senses with a something soft and sweet that he could not put into thought. Rose Emer took it from him and set it in her breast.

That was a picture Polaris never forgot—the rocky walls of the pass, the sledge and

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the wild dogs, the strange figure of the Sardanian, the girl and the red rose.

She had removed her heavy coat and cap, and now walked on ahead of them, her long blue sweater clinging to her lissom form, the sunshine glinting in the coiled masses of her chestnut hair. They rounded another turn, and Rose Emer gave a little gasp and stopped, and stood transfixed.

"Oh, here is, indeed, a garden of the gods!" she cried.

There the rock ledges ended, and they stood at the lip of a long green slope of sward, spangled with flowers. A valley lay before them, of which they were at the lower end. Ringed by the smoking mountains, it stretched away, some ten miles in length. From the lower hill slopes at either side it was perhaps a short mile and a half across. Adown its length, nearly in the middle, ran the silvery ribbon of a little river, which bore away to the right at the lower end of the valley, and was lost to sight in the base of the hills.

AT EITHER side of the river the land lay in rolling knolls and lush meadows, with here and there a tangle of giant trees, and here and there geometrical squares of tilled land—the whole spread out, from where the travelers stood, in an immense patchwork pattern, riotous with the colors of nature, and dotted with the white dwellings of men, built of stone.

On the higher slopes of the mountains at each side thick forests of mighty trees grew. Above the line of vegetation, the bare earth gave forth vapor from the inner heat, and farther up the naked rocks jutted to the peaks, half hidden in their perpetual mists and smoke.

There were twenty-one mountains, all of the same general appearance, with one exception. One great hill alone, which towered over to the left of them, was wooded thickly to its summit.

Everywhere in the valley was the sound of life. Birds flashed back and forth among the foliage; goats leaped among the rocks; small ponies grazed in the meadows; men tilled the fields. From the distance up the valley came the hum and splashing of a small waterfall. A couple of miles away, at the right of the river, was a large square of buildings that gleamed white in the sunlight, where many people were moving about.

"Behold, Sardanes!" said Kard the Smith, advancing to the edge of the rock.

Rose Emer caught the word Sardanes and echoed it.

"Sardanes," she breathed, and turned to Polaris with an awed look in her eyes. "It is as if a page of the ages had been turned back for us, isn't it?" she asked.

From the wondrous scene he glanced to the face of the girl and smiled quietly, and she remembered that here was one who gazed for the first time on the reality of the world of men of any age.

Kard raised his voice in a long, shrill call. His voice was lost in the angry baying of the dog pack as a small goat leaped from covert close to them and clattered away up the ledges.

At the combined clamor, several men raised their faces wonderingly from their work in a field near by. For a moment they gazed in amazement at the travelers, and then ran toward them, talking excitedly as they went.

All were clad lightly in sleeveless tunics of cloth that reached the knees. They wore no head coverings, and their faces and bare arms were tanned from exposure to the sun. Their feet were covered with leather sandals, buckled at the ankle. Their limbs were bare from the sandals to the short, loose-legged trousers, which they wore beneath their tunic skirts. The texture of their garments was dyed in several different hues.

Nearly all wore close-cropped beards like that of Kard, and their hair was trimmed at the neck. Armlets and rings and the buckles on their garments, all of the strange, iridescent metal, glittered in the sunlight as they ran.

For a moment there was a babel of astonished queries leveled at Kard the Smith as the men pulled up and drank in the sight of the strangers and their yet stranger beasts, now roused to a frenzy which required all of the authority of Polaris to hold in bounds. "Who?" and "What?" and "Where?" came in breathless succession from the mouths of the Sardanians.

"Now, be quiet, all of you, that I may tell you," commanded Kard with a disgusted wave of his hand. They were spoiling his peroration for him.

"These," and he waved his hand again, "be Polaris of the Snows, and Rose Emer of America, come to visit Sardanes. The man with the sunlight hair and eyes of the sky

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hath lived in the outer snows all his life, he saith. The woman," and Kard bowed ow, "is a great princess from the world far o the north, beyond all the snows, the vorld whereof the priests have sung."

Truly, the imagination of Kard was equal o the effect he wished to produce on his ellows. Their tongues stilled by their wonder, they gazed at the man and the woman. Then, as by common impulse, they bowed low, with sweeping gestures of their right hands. A fresh chorus of questions would have broken out, but Kard quickly forstalled it.

"The rest of my tale, also the wonders which the strangers may unfold, wait the ear of the Prince Helicon," he said curtly. Now, haste ye and bring horses to transport the strangers' goods, for their beasts are aweary, and we will proceed to the judgment House."

Two of the younger men hurried to one of the nearer dwellings and returned shortly with two span of the small horses which grazed in the meadows. They were in harness, and it was not difficult to attach them to the sledge in place of the dogs, which Polaris took out of harness and held in leash. Fearing that Sardanian legs would suffer if he did not, he took the precaution to bind the muzzle of each dog with thongs.

A lad mounted the sledge and cracked a long whip, and the stout ponies bent to the work of hauling the sledge.

With Kard leading the way, Polaris and Rose Emer set off in the direction of the square of white buildings up the valley. Their dogs huddled closely around them, a formidable body-guard, and with them marched an escort of Sardanians, momentarily augmented by every new man who set eyes on them.

EVERYTHING that he saw was a marvel to Polaris. And for Rose Emer, who had wandered up and down the world considerably, the ancient valley was spread with wonders. Never had she seen, outside of California, trees of such giant girth and height as some of those which grew at the base of the hills; and they were of no kin to the Californian Sequoia. Birds that she could not name flew among their branches.

Set in the midst of their orderly little farms were houses of a sort not seen in the world to-day. They were constructed for the most part of colored stone, faced with white, and with high-pillared porticoes. Each brought a memory of a pictured temple of antiquity.

They crossed the river on a small bridge of green stone. As they drew nearer to the square of buildings they could see that it was evidently a public gathering place. Each of its four fronts was a lofty peristyle, inclosing a square of considerable size. Through its arches they caught sight of a raised stage, facing many seats of stone.

News of their coming had preceded them. From all directions people were flocking into the public square and occupying the stone seats.

"All who live in the valley are gathering to bid us welcome, lady," said Polaris, and added an echo to the thoughts of the girl, "May our leave-taking be as peaceful as our welcome!"

When they had arrived at the square they found that it stood in the center of a pleasant park, with clumps of trees, stone-curbed pools, and playing fountains. Scattered about on massive pedestals were groups of statuary of no mean artistry, some in white marble and others of colored stones. For the most part fanciful subjects were represented, but some of the groups evidently were of a historical significance.

One, in particular, of large size, showed a company of men landing on a shore from the decks of a ship. The vessel bore a marked resemblance to an ancient galley, such as Rose Emer often had seen pictured. There were the high decks and the banks of oars.

All these sculptured men wore armor and trappings of patterns as ancient as the ship, heightening the likeness of this place of Sardanian art to an antique Greek statuary. Around the central building lay a paved plaza.

Conducted by their escort, which had grown to nearly a hundred men, Rose Emer and Polaris and their gray comrades entered the building through one of the high arches. The entrance led to one side of the raised stage.

While the members of their Sardanian escort scattered to the seats below, Kard the Smith ushered the man and the girl to a flight of stone steps by which they gained the dais.

On the platform was another raised piece of marble work, of glistening white, a flight of steps leading up to a carved double

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throne, set between two pillars. Across the tops of the pillars was a scrolled plinth, inscribed with Greek lettering as follows:

ΕΛΙΚΩΝΚΡΕΩΝΤΗΣΣΑΡΔΑΝΗΣΟΦΘ

" 'Helicon, the ninety-ninth prince of Sardanes,' " Polaris translated for Rose's benefit. "In the original, *'Helikon kreon tes Sardanes ho kop-pa-theta.'* "

On the space below the throne were a number of other stone seats. Throne and platform were empty, with one exception. A little apart from the other seats was one of black stone, and on it was seated a young man. His garb was similar to that of the other Sardanians, but was of exceedingly fine texture, and all of black, unrelieved by any ornament or touch of color.

When the strangers came upon the platform he turned toward them a long-favored, highly intellectual countenance. His face was shaven smoothly, and his long black hair was held back from his temples by a band of black cloth. He reclined rather than sat in his stone chair, with an elbow on its arm and his chin on his hand.

As Polaris and Rose Emer became visible to the people below a subdued hum of excitement arose; but the young man on the black stone seat remained impassive, and regarded them with a steady, searching gaze, with no outward evidence of surprise.

"A greeting to thee, Kalin, priest of Sardanes!" called Kard, throwing out his hand in salutation. The young man replied with a careless movement of the hand that lay in his lap, without disturbing his posture of repose.

Down in the great hall hundreds of Sardanian eyes were centered on the strangers. Momentarily the seats were filling with new arrivals. Nearly half of the gathering were women, and many of them were handsome.

They were costumed in kirtles, belted in below the bosom and flowing loosely to below the knee. They wore their hair in plaits, coiled about the tops of their heads. Ornaments of glittering metal bedecked their garments and hair. Their feet were clad in sandals of soft leather, laced above the ankles, and in half stockings of cloth, gartered and bowed below the knees. Rose Emer was quick to note that some of them were striking beauties.

Without exception, they were brunettes.

Kard conducted Polaris and the girl to seats at one side and a short distance from the central throne.

"We bide the coming of the Prince Helicon," he explained, "who cometh shortly."

For a few moments they sat in silence. Then voices were heard from an entrance at the far side of the stage, and with one accord the Sardanians in the hall rose from their seats.

"The prince cometh!" murmured Kard.

Polaris and Rose Emer arose also.

CHAPTER X

THE GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

EVERY Sardanian hand in the great ha' was uplifted in salute as five men entered through one of the pillared arches. Two of them were of bearded middle age, evidently persons of station in the land; but the eyes of the throng and the eyes of Rose Emer and Polaris passed them indifferently, to gaze on the three who followed.

It did not need the whisper of Kard the Smith, "He in the center is the prince," to distinguish the ruler of Sardanes. He was not more richly garbed than his companions, or differently. Neither was he taller than they, or of more commanding presence. All of the three were of great height, and all carried themselves regally. Something in the mien of his high-featured, thoughtful face, in his large black eyes, and in the lines of his smoothly shaven countenance bespoke his kingship as surely as though a herald had preceded him and cried out: "This is Helicon, Prince of Sardanes!"

The three were brothers, Helicon, the eldest, was well under thirty years. The two who walked on either side of him were of the startling likeness to each other found only in twins.

Surprise was written large on the features of all of the party as they came into the open space before the throne, and they halted. The two nobles stared frankly. The faces of the twin princes expressed a kindly curiosity, not unmixed with the general awe in which the Sardanians held the strangers. In the face of Helicon was a similar expression, but with less of awe and more of grave dignity.

His eyes roved over the pack of dogs, to

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him the most unusual figures of the group; hesitated in admiration at the splendid form of Polaris, and passed to Rose-Emer.

As their glances met, the eyes of the prince opened wide, and seemed suddenly to become suffused. Then they snapped back to the face of Polaris, and seemed to carry a quick question. The son of the snows regarded him calmly; but there was in his calmness a challenge, the more deadly because of its quietude. His right hand, which rested on the neck of Marcus, contracted so powerfully that the dog whined in pain. Polaris knew that he had found an enemy.

Helicon swung on his heel and ascended the steps to the throne.

The nobles and the two tall princes took seats, and Kard the Smith, with the enthusiasm of the born orator, stood forth to tell his story.

"The man, sayest thou, cometh out of the snows, and speaketh our tongue?" interrupted Helicon in the midst of the tale.

"Even so, prince," said Kard.

"And the woman cometh from beyond, and speaketh not our language, but one of her own, which the man speaketh also? And the woman is a princess in her own land?"

"That, O prince, is true!"

"Then cease though thy tale, Kard, and let us hear from the man in our tongue, of himself and of the princess, and of how they came hither."

With little relish for such cutting short of his bombast, Kard the Smith stood back and yielded the floor to Polaris.

In a few words the man of the snows sketched the chances which had brought the girl and himself to Sardanes.

"Then thou wert reared in the great wilderness, and knowest naught of the world, or of Sardanes, or even of who thou thyself art?" questioned Helicon. His voice was even and courteously intoned; but, though the man he questioned was of little experience, Polaris understood the sneer that lay in the words.

"So it seemeth, Prince Helicon," he answered quietly.

"And the woman thou didst find in the snows, she is a princess? I can well believe that."

"Nay, prince, for she cometh from America, a great land where there are no princes or princesses. Yet is she of high rank in her land, as her birth and wealth entitle her."

Helicon frowned. "How meanest thou—a land in which are neither princes or princesses?" he asked quickly. "How, then, are the people in that land ruled?"

"By the people themselves are the people ruled in America, O prince," Polaris answered. "The whole of the country and its lesser divisions are governed by men chosen by the people to rule for certain spaces of years, when others are chosen."

"Are there, then, no kings or princes in the world?" asked Helicon sharply.

"Aye, princes and kings rule in many of the lands of the world," answered Polaris, "but their power is limited more and more by the wishes of their people. In some other lands the government is like that in America."

"Truly, this America of which thou speakest must be a strange country. Here in Sardanes I hold the power of decision over life and death; aye, even unto the Gateway to the Future extendeth the power of Sardane's prince."

"Yet," and the voice of Polaris rang like a bell—"yet, of all lands in the world, is America the greatest—and hath no prince or king."

Over the face of the prince passed a flush of annoyance. He waved his hand in dismissal of the conversation.

"Hospitality shall be thine, outlander of the snows. Thou shalt rest and be refreshed. More of thy strange tales will I hear anon. And the girl—" His eyes softened as they strayed again to Rose Emer, and again the red blood flashed up in his cheeks. For a moment he seemed lost in his thoughts.

ALL THROUGH the interview the young man in the black stone seat had sat motionless and attentive, his eyes glued on the strangers, his ears drinking in every word spoken by Polaris, his expression rapt. Now he arose and stepped forward. Before the Prince Helicon could speak again he interposed.

"If it be pleasing to the strangers, I, Kalin the Priest, will make them welcome at mine own home in the Gateway to the Future." Without waiting for the objection which the prince seemed to be framing, Kalin addressed himself directly to Polaris.

"Is the hospitality of Kalin welcome to thee, O man with the hair of the sun? Much there is that Kalin fain would learn from thee, and perhaps some little that he may tell thee in return. Say, wilt come, thou and the woman?"

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Polaris looked into his eyes, and somewhere in their dreamy depths he thought he read more meaning than the words of the priest conveyed to him. He stepped forward and tendered his hand, a form of salutation which, although new to the Sardanians, Kalin accepted.

"Thy most kind offer of hospitality I accept for myself and for the lady," Polaris said. "She hath, I fear, much need of rest."

They left Helicon on the throne in the Judgement House, looking as if he liked the new arrangement little enough. As they passed out of the hall, five or six men, all dressed in somber black, detached themselves from the crowd of Sardanians and joined Kalin the priest. Under his direction

As they jumped the sky seemed to shower dogs

they fetched the sledge and drove it toward the lower end of the valley, whither Kalin and his two guests followed.

On the way Polaris told Rose Emer of the meaning of the conversation in the hall, which she had understood only so much as she was able to guess from the demeanor of the prince and of Polaris. As they talked, Kalin, although their tongue was unknown to him, courteously walked ahead.

"They seem to be a happy people, but I don't think I'm going to like this prince

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of theirs," said Rose Emer when she heard the details of the talk. "And you, who never have seen America, have so defended it that you have put the gentleman out sadly. From what you have said to him, he will think that we have no very exalted opinion of princes. If he were not such a grave-looking personage I should think that he tried to flirt with me."

"What is the meaning of 'flirt,' lady?" asked Polaris.

Rose Emer's answer was a silvery laugh. "Sometimes, in your cold and snows, your knowledge makes me feel like a child; but when you get back to where I came from you will have a great deal to learn," she said lightly.

In spite of the privations and terrors through which she had passed, and the grief at the loss of her brother, the spirits of Rose Emer were rising amazingly in the warmth and sunshine of Sardanes. For all her lightness of speech, the girl could not but feel alarmed at the expression she had read in the eyes of the Prince Helicon, although she would not admit to Polaris that she had taken note of it.

They crossed the little bridge again and the plain beyond it, and began the ascent of the one green mountain that stood verdure-clad in strange contrast to its score of bleak-crowned sisters.

"What do they mean by the 'Gateway to the Future,' Polaris?" asked the girl.

Polaris, in turn, put the question to Kalin.

"It lieth before us," said the priest, pointing to the green mountainside. "Hast thou not noted that in all Sardanes no man or woman is old, or crooked of body, or diseased? When the first chills of age creep upon a Sardanian and bow his form and whiten his hair, then he cometh to me and passeth through the gateway. Thither likewise come the dead when one dieth in the land through a mischance or sudden illness. To me also are brought the babes that are misshapen at birth or that give promise of but puny life.

"To that which lieth beyond life, be it of glory or of oblivion, all Sardanians pass through the Gateway to the Future; and I, Kalin, am guardian to the gateway. The gateway itself shalt thou see anon."

Polaris translated. Rose Emer shuddered. "And I thought them such a happy people!" she said. "How can they be with such strange, terrible customs?"

Kalin, it seemed, had the trick of reading people's thoughts, for he answered:

"It hath been so almost from the first. When our ancestors peopled Sardanes they came to realize that for them to live on in the small land and remain a people their numbers must be limited. Thus hath it been done.

"Sardanians know of no other way, and are content therewith. Think of what is spared—terrible old age that creepeth on a strong man and decays him; that withers his limbs and fades the bloom of youth in his cheeks; of the horrors and distempers which make of life a misery and a mockery; of the sorrow of living on misshapen and helpless. In thy world do all such abide with thee?"

Polaris told him that in the world each one waited for his appointed hour of death, and that it was sin to hasten it for another or for oneself. The priest shrugged his shoulders.

Higher and higher they ascended the wooded slopes of the mighty hill, and came to a ledge many yards in width, so earthed and covered with vegetation and trees that it was like a huge terrace. There were a number of dwellings similar to those below in the valley. At the back of the terrace the side of the mountain was sheer for many feet and covered with vines.

In the center, at the level of the terrace, stood a giant facade of white stone, carved and scrolled and pillared. Through its arches they looked into the entrance to a lofty gallery in the heart of the rock.

Kalin ushered them into a room in one of the houses, and attendants fetched them fruits and bread with a sweet, unfermented wine. In another building near the edge of the terrace he showed Polaris a building, used as a stable for a number of the small ponies, where he might bestow the dogs; and at his word another of his servants brought both bread and flesh for the animals. When they were refreshed the priest led them to couch-rooms, bidding them to rest.

"Take thou thy rest well, man of the snows; there is much in thy path to try thee," he said to Polaris with a slow smile. Thinking on the enigma of his words, and of the wonders of the lost world, Polaris fell into the deep sleep which his body craved.

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CHAPTER XI

THE FIERY PORTAL

AWAKING after many hours, Polaris found Kalin standing by his couch.

"Stranger, thou sleepest well. Like an untroubled babe's are thy slumbers," said the priest. "And yet, if I read thee aright, thou art in all ways a strong man. The woman is outdone and sleepeth well. There is that which I would have thee see."

He led him to the edge of the terrace. A little procession of Sardanians was toiling up the path by which they had come. Among them walked a man who was the center of the group, to whom the others, one by one, spoke affectionately, but who answered little. As they came nearer, Polaris saw that he was in the prime of his life and of noble figure; but his limbs were wasted and his face was drawn with lines of suffering.

At the brink of the terrace the group halted. One by one his companions bade the man farewell, lifting their hands in the Sardanian salute. One young woman threw herself, weeping, into his arms, and he kissed her tenderly.

Then the other members of the party took their way down the mountainside again, leading with them the weeping girl. The man came on alone. On the terrace he was received by two of the black-robed attendants of Kalin.

The priest drew Polaris to one side, and they proceeded out of view of the man by a roundabout way to the great stone arch.

"Hither cometh one sore afflicted with illness who would pass the gateway, and thou shalt see him pass," said the priest.

They entered through the arch into the vast cavern beyond, and soon were in darkness, to which, however, the eyes of Kalin seemed to be well accustomed. He led Polaris swiftly through many galleries in the bowels of the mountainside, ever upward, until they reached a broad way, dimly lighted from above, which took a spiral course through the rock. Up the spiral way they passed, and it gave after three or four turns upon a wide, rocky floor, which curved away to either side of where they emerged.

Above them many feet towered the rocky ring of the volcano, of which they were in the crater. Its walls were beetling, scarred with ancient fires, seamed and ragged. Crag upon crag, ledge upon ledge, rose the wall; to where its circle cut a round expanse of blue sky.

All around them the massive rock reverberated to the muffled roar of a great fire far below. Where the shelving rock floor gave into space, clouds of luminous vapors rose from out the mighty pit of the crater. Where the sun's rays beat down through it, far above them, the billowing mass was golden. Directly ahead of them it seethed in a shifting play of colors, now lurid red, now green and yellow and blue, in the reflection cast up from the flickering flames below.

At times the vapor clouds were wafted aside by air currents, and Polaris could see the wall of the crater opposite, some two hundred feet across the pit.

To the left the shelf of rock narrowed to a mere thread of a pathway, overhung by the bulge of the crag wall. At the right a number of low buildings of rock had been constructed along the face of the cliff.

Kalin led Polaris to where the rock overhung the path, and showed him a number of footholds in the wall, by which he might climb to another small ledge above, and from which he could command a view of the platform, and also look down directly into the fearsome pit of flames. The priest then withdrew to one of the buildings.

Polaris crouched at the brink of the little shelf and gazed down through the many-hued vapor clouds which were wafted by him continuously. Occasionally, when they were swept aside by drafts of air, he could see the very bottom of the crater over which he clung. It was a sight to awe the heart of the bravest.

Hundreds of feet from where he crouched seethed and boiled and eddied a terrible caldron of chromatic heat. It was evident that the volcano was slowly dying, a death that might continue for centuries.

Nearer to the base of the crater its circumference was greater. At its bottom, in the course of ages, the substance of the fires had cooled, forming a crust against the calcined rock walls. As the fires themselves had sunk lower they had added to the deposit of crust, leaving it in the shape of a huge funnel.

In the funnel itself stewed and sweltered a lake of fire. It was nearly an acre in extent, bounded by the glowing circumfer-

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ence of the funnel. Its molten substance boiled and eddied in a fury of heat. Immense volumes of gas were continually belched up through it with startling detonations, spouting many feet in the air, to flame a brief instant, while the blazing masses they threw up with them fell splashing back into the fearful reek. For yards above the surface of the caldron the crust glowed a dull red. Even where the man sat the heat was withering.

Voices on the rock shelf to his right drew the attention of Polaris from the broiling inferno, into which he had gazed fascinated.

From the spiral path up which he had lately climbed stepped one of the black-garbed priests, bearing a flickering torch. Behind him, walking with firm step and quiet gestures, was the Sardanian Polaris had seen crossing the terrace. On either side of him marched two other priests, and a fourth brought up the rear of the little procession. All four of the priests wore veils, through which their eyes glittered somberly.

THEY halted a few feet from the brink of the fiery precipice. By the light of the priest's torch Polaris saw that the rock floor had been cut away into a runway, or chute, at a sharp angle from the floor level, notching the edge of the declivity and ending sharply in the empty air of the great pit. The sides of the trough glittered like polished glass in the light rays.

One of the priests disappeared into the nearest of the stone buildings and came out bearing a disk of dark wood. It was concaved and not much larger than a warrior's shield, which indeed it much resembled, for within it were two loops of rope or thong, which might have served for armholds. The priest set it down near the upper end of the channel in the rock.

More torches hung in cressets along the wall were lighted, their flames reflecting from thousands of little veins and flecks of metal in the rock, and heightening the eery effect of the strange scene.

When these preparations were completed, Kalin stepped forth on the ledge. He was garbed in a flowing robe of flame red, his head hidden in a veiled hood, of which the section that covered his face was white.

He stepped in front of the waiting man and raised his hand in a solemn salute.

"Chloran, son of Sardon; thou hast come to the Gate?" he asked.

"Aye, priest," answered Chloran.

"Thy house is in order, thy farewells made, thy work done?"

"Aye, Chloran stands ready."

"Then thou comest content to the temple of the Lord Hephaistos?"

"Well content."

"Chloran, son of Sardon, we, the ministers of the Lord Hephaistos, are but the guardians of the Gate. We know not what lieth beyond it, but thou shalt soon learn. Be it of good or of evil for thee, thine own heart mayest answer, the depths of which no man may know. I, Kalin the Priest, bid thee farewell on thy journey to a greater knowledge than is Kalin's. To the Lord Hephaistos, whose servant I am, I commend thee."

He raised his hand again, and Chloran bowed his head. One of the attendant priests came up, bearing a metal vase.

"Quaff deeply of the wine of Hephaistos," said Kalin. The man clutched the vase and drank. Almost immediately his eyes glazed, and he stood like a man of stone. Two of the priests led him to the chute and seated him on the wooden shield, binding his thighs with the thongs.

"Welcome, Chloran, to the Gateway to the Future," cried Kalin. But Chloran heard him not. The powerful drug in the wine bound his senses. His head fell forward. At a sign from Kalin the two priests shoved the shield into the chute. Down the polished way it whirled, and shot out into the fiery rift.

Polaris clung at the brink of the little ledge and strained his eyes out into the terrible, fire-shot chasm to watch the fall. With its living burden the shield whirled down through the curling vapors, straight toward the molten caldron that tossed and roared in the funnel. In a breath it had fallen so far that it looked like a toy fluttering above the flames.

Then it was gone. So intense was the heat into which it fell that it seemed to dissolve into vapor before it ever touched the surface. A long, yellow tongue of flame shot up from the surface of the lake.

Polaris turned to the ledge. The priests had extinguished the torches and disappeared. Presently Kalin came forth from his chapel and called to him. With one more glance into the depths of the sinister pit, he descended from his perch in the rock and joined the priest.

They proceeded toward the chapel.

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As Polaris passed the chute he stumbled. His feet shot from under him and down on his back he fell on the polished stone, and he, too, went whizzing head first down the way that Chloran, son of Sardon, had taken into the terrible firepit of Hephaistos!

Head first he shot down. As he slid by a mighty effort he turned over in the chute and thrust out his arms. The chute was about the width of a man's height. Polaris was exceptionally broad of shoulder, and his arms were long, so that his hands rubbed the sides of the chute.

Just as his head thrust over the brink of the awful chasm his hands found holds at either side of the chute. Whoever had cut the way in the rock in the long ago had left, almost at the very edge, a cleft in each side that was large enough for hand-grip. Very probably they were the holds by which the artisans steadied themselves while they hewed and polished the stone of the chute.

In those clefts the groping fingers of Polaris caught and held. The impetus of his body would have torn away the hold of a man less splendidly muscled than the son of the snows; but with a mighty wrench of his arms he stayed his progress and hung with head projected over the brink of the pit.

All in an instant it happened, and with no noise; for Polaris, fearful as was his plight, did not cry out, and neither did Kalin, who saw him fall. From out of the blackness that was behind him Polaris heard the priest gasp, and then for a moment all was silence but for the roaring of the fires far below.

Kalin crept to the brink of the precipice and peered over. Below him he saw the head of Polaris.

"Now," he muttered to himself, but not so low that Polaris could not hear him—"Now, I think it were well perhaps for Sardanes, and especially well for the Prince Helicon, did I let this stranger go on his way to Hephaistos. Nay, but he is a brave man, and I have come to like him strangely, and I cannot.

"Ho, thou, Polaris of the Snows, canst hold that grip of thine while I fetch rope?" he called aloud.

"Aye, Kalin the priest, I can hold for many minutes if so be thou art minded to aid me," answered Polaris grimly. "If thou art not, then I go hence through this strange gate of thine."

"Hold, then," said the priest, and hurried to the chapel, marveling at the hardihood of the man, who hung on the brink of death, and who cried not for aid or mercy.

Back he came in a moment with a stout rope and cast the loop of it over Polaris's head. Then he stepped back, braced his feet against the rocky floor, and, exerting a strength whereof his slender frame did not seem capable, he dragged Polaris from his perilous resting-place.

WHEN he felt the firmness of the floor beneath his feet again Polaris drew a long breath. He turned to the priest and looked him closely in the eyes.

"Kalin, henceforth I may not doubt that in Sardanes I have found a friend. Thanks for thy deed I have not the words to express to thee. If ever thou are in evil case may I be as near to aid thee." He extended his hand and wrung that of the priest until Kalin winced.

Together the two went down the spiral way through the mountainside to the house of the priest.

"Thou hast taken note of all that occurred?" asked Kalin. Polaris nodded. "And has understood?" continued the priest.

"Not altogether. Who is the Lord Hephaistos? That name is known to me as that of the armorer god of the Greeks of old, but only one of their many gods. How is it that ye of Sardanes, who also speak the tongue of those Greeks, worship the dead god of a people long dead?"

"Stranger, thou speakest boldly to the hereditary priest of the religion of Sardanes," replied Kalin, and a quizzical smile played about his lips. "Thou spakest boldly also to the Prince of Sardanes, thou, who art but one alone in a strange land. I think that fear abides not in thee. But—" and he rested his hand on the shoulder of Polaris—"perhaps Kalin doth but love thee the better for thy temerity. And Kalin's self, although he be of Sardanes, yet seemeth at times to feel strangely alone. As for the religion, I will show to thee the annals of the Sardanians, with what of history, both of the people and the religion, they contain. Perchance, in thy world, shouldst thou indeed ever reach it—and it comes to me that thou wilt—these tales will find ready ears, and be to thy great credit."

From a stone seat in front of the house of the priest a figure arose and came for-

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ward to meet them, and Polaris and Kalin halted and gazed in wonder. Rose Emer it was—a new and amazing Rose. Ministered to by one of the women of the priest's household, she had slept and bathed, and then had arrayed herself in the full costume of a Sardanian lady of quality, which the woman had brought her.

Around her slender form, clinging to each gracious curve was draped a flowing kirtle of a delicate blue tint, belted in below her bosom with a broad girdle of soft, tan-colored leather. Its skirt swept the tops of a pair of gossamer hose of the same hue as the gown. Her feet were encased in neat little laced sandals of material similar to that of the girdle.

To complete the effect, her long chestnut hair was plaited and coiled about her head in the Sardanian fashion, and the whole was set off with a filmy blue veil, bound turban-wise, its tassels falling on her shoulder.

Kalin advanced and bowed, a courtly and sweeping genuflection.

"Thou dost Sardanes honor, lady, and all the valley is the brighter for thy beauty," he murmured.

Then Kalin fetched forth a packet of manuscripts, well written in Greek characters on parchments that were yellowed and crinkly with extreme age.

"Here be the records of a nation," he said, and set to work to sort them over.

CHAPTER XII

WAR AND AN ARMISTICE

FROM many an ancient parchment Kalin read to them bits of the lore of the Sardanians, and a strange store of knowledge and incident did the yellowed, leathery scraps unfold. For, as might be judged, the Sardanians had come down from Antiquity; and, as might be guessed, they were an offshoot of old Greece – the Greece that Homer sang.

"Some great city had been sacked," explained the priest, "and from its siege one adventurous party of warriors, with some of their women, turned their faces from their home across the Aegean Seas to the Pillars of Hercules even"—which means that they sailed through the Mediterranean to the Straits of Gibraltar—"and passed the pillars to the great seas beyond. There they sail north, seeking the barbarous isles, where strange metals and red-haired slaves might be gathered"—Britain.

"From the isles they turned southward toward home again, but a great tempest took their ship and whirled it away from the coasts. Down past the Pillars of Hercules the storm drove them, along the coasts of Libya"—Africa. "For weeks were they buffeted in a mighty gale, whirled ever to the south into the gates of the ice gods. Nearly perishing in the cold and for lack of food, on a day a mighty wave came from the north and their ship rode the crest of it through the barriers of ice, and came to this place.

"On a snow-bound shore they landed, those Acheans, with their women and their captives, and pushed on toward the green mountains, whose smoky summits they could not see ahead of them to the south. Thus they came to Sardanes, finding it even as ye see it this day, except that the Gateway to the Future was then as are its sister mountains, for the eternal fires flared at its top.

"So was Sardanes peopled, and the Sardanians of to-day are all the descendants of that little ship's company and their women and their captives from the barbarous isles. For a time they were sore beset in the valley by the great beasts which dwelt here, and they were fain to make their homes in the caves of the smoking hills. But as the years drew on they slew the beasts, and some of the great bones remain even until now in witness of their struggles. Then they built their homes in the valley and throve and multiplied and became a people."

"But what of the Gateway to the Future and the worship of the Lord Hephaistos?" asked Polaris, who had followed the tale of the priest with minute attention, translating it the while to the girl, who listened breathlessly to this unfolding of the pages of the dead past.

"Hephaistos was the smith god of the Acheans," answered Kalin, "and when they came hither they believed that it was Hephaistos who had shown mercy to them and saved them out of the cold and the icy seas. This valley, said the wise men, must be the forge and smithy of the god himself. So, as he had taken them under his protection and set them to dwell in his workshop, they came to worship him alone of all the gods they had known.

"Then, in time, when the ancient fires began to burn low in one of the hills, it was believed that the god was angered, and

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many sacrifices were made, that he might not forget the people and withdraw from the valley the warmth and light of his forge fires. Should he do so, the valley must go back to the arms of the snows and the people of Sardanes perish miserable one by one with the coming of the terrible cold.

"Thus grew up the customs of the religion which thou hast seen, but ever the ancient fires eats deeper in the pit of the mountain, and ever a great fear lies in the hearts of all Sardanians that some time the fires of the other mountains will follow that fire and leave Sardanes the prey of the ice and snow and darkness that wait without her gates."

Then Kalin questioned Polaris in turn of the world, and listened with an intentness that was wistful to stories of the histories of the great peoples that have ruled the earth since the Greece of which his traditions told him.

"Ah, that I might see it!" he sighed. "Fain I am to fare to the North with thee, and to see the great world and to learn new things before I go into the darkness. But I know not how that may be."

Polaris learned from the priest that his office had been handed down from father to son for uncounted centuries, but that he himself was unwed, and thus far had no successor. He learned further that a few years before, on the coming of Prince Helicon to the throne of Sardanes, there had been a division in church and state, as it were—that the headstrong prince would have none of the domination or advice of the priesthood in conducting the affairs of the kingdom.

In consequence of that, there was a coolness between the prince and Kalin, and each had his followers in the land. Some of the people sided with the prince. Others were for the priests and the religion, and looked with terror on anything that might anger further the Lord Hephaistos. Thus far, however, there had been no open break, and the relations of the prince and his brethren with Kalin and the priests of the gateway, if cold, were not openly hostile.

"And now," said Kalin, with a strange smile, "thou comest to Sardanes, thou and the lady with thee, and Kalin sees a storm in the brewing."

"How meanest thou?" questioned Polaris quickly, although he guessed at Kalin's meaning. "We come but to tarry a brief space, and then to find our way to the North again, where is the lady's home, and whither Polaris carries a message of the dead."

"That way to the North may be hard to win, my brother," answered Kalin. "What wilt thou do if the Prince Helicon shall decree that thou goest not?"

Polaris laughed shortly. "Not by the Prince Helicon, or by any who dwell in Sardanes, shall Polaris be kept from that way to the North," he answered. "Not while the breath of life is in his body."

"Whatsoever be thy ways, O stranger, know that Kalin wisheth thee but good fortune, and will lend thee his aid to it. Aye, even though it crosseth the desires of the Prince Helicon, as well it may," he muttered.

Grown suddenly sober, Rose Emer laid her hand earnestly on Polaris's arm. "Can we go back to the North?" she asked. "Is it possible? Is there a chance that we can cross those leagues of snow and ice and live to find our ship?"

The man looked into her eyes. "Lady, is it your wish to go?" he questioned.

"I must go back, back to my home, and—Oh, we *must* go; but you— Will it not be at the risk of our lives?"

Polaris smiled quietly. "Where the Lady Rose wishes to go, Polaris will not be left behind. I, too, *must* go to the North. I will not even suggest that you might wait here on a chance that I might fetch aid to take you. We will go together, and, though the way be hard, as Kalin here says, we will win through to the ship and to your home. Fear it not."

Impulsively the girl held out her hand to him, and Polaris bent over it and kissed it.

Through his half-closed, dreaming eyes, Kalin watched them, and smiled; but with a wistful tightening at the corners of his mouth.

THREE days they had rested at the dwelling of the priest, when there came a messenger to the mountain from the Prince Helicon, bidding their attendance at the Judgement House, where the prince would hear more of their strange tales of the world.

In a gorgeous state costume Rose Emer made a brave showing as they set forth for the Judgement House, and beside her strode Polaris in the full garb of a Sardanian noble, his gift from Kalin the priest. In dark blue, edged with bands of white, he was cos-

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umed with his necklace of bear's teeth falling on the broad bosom of his tunic. He carried no weapon openly, but under the skirt of the tunic, in its leather holster, he had belted one of his father's trusty revolvers.

They found the Prince Helicon sitting as they had left him, on his pillared throne, and Morolas and Minos, the tall twin brothers, lolled on their seats of stone at the throne's foot. Several of the Sardanian nobles occupied seats on the dais. A great number of the people were gathered to hear more of the tales of the strangers.

Many tales of the world Polaris told them, turning often to Rose Emer for answers to those questions which his own knowledge did not hold. At length he broached the subject that was uppermost in his mind, that of their departure from the land.

At his mention of going Helicon frowned.

"And thou wilt rashly dare to cross the great deserts of snow in a vain attempt to win back to the world?" he asked.

"In the great desert was I reared, O prince," Polaris answered him. "I fear not its terrors. I must face to the North, and soon—"

"But surely thou wilt not think to expose the lady to the dangers of the path," interrupted the prince. "She will remain in Sardanes, and, if indeed thou shalt come safely to the other side of the snow wastes, perchance her own people will find a means to come and transport her afterward."

"Nay, but she shall not remain here, prince," answered Polaris sharply and steadily. "She, too, wishes to be on the way, and no one may transport her across the bitter wilderness more safely than I, who know how and have the ready means to travel it."

Prince Helicon turned his eyes to Rose Emer. A flush mounted to his cheeks and his eyes glittered as he drank in her loveliness.

"How know I that the lady wishes to be so soon gone?" he asked. "It is in my mind that Helicon, Prince of Sardanes, might persuade her to remain, had I the words to talk to her in her own tongue."

He paused and seemed to consider. Polaris watched him with narrowing eyes, and in his anger would not answer lest he might say too much.

"Now, say thou to the lady," spoke Helicon with sudden decision, "that Helicon offers her the love of a prince and the half of the throne of Sardanes. Tell her, and be sure that thou dost translate aright, and her answer to me also."

POLARIS'S face was clouded, but he turned to Rose and repeated evenly to her the proposal of the prince.

Rose Emer paled and then flushed, and instinctively she rested her hand on the arm of her comrade.

"Say to the Prince Helicon that his words do me great honor, very great honor," she answered; "but I am an American girl, and am lonely for my own home and people. Now we are rested, and I wish to go, no matter what may be the risks. And tell him also that I cannot be his wife, because—because—I already am promised to another."

Under his anger and back of his spirit a cold hand clutched at the heart of the man of the snows, but he turned to the prince and repeated the words of the girl.

Helicon's eyes were bright with anger. "Art altogether sure that thou hast made plain both my words and hers, O stranger?" he cried.

"He doubts my words, lady," said Polaris. "Perhaps you can make him understand."

"I think I can," answered Rose. She fronted the prince, and stared him coolly in the face. Then she turned and held out her arms toward the North. Turning again to Helicon, she threw out her right hand, with the palm toward him, in a repellent gesture. "I think you will not misunderstand that, prince," she said in English.

Nor did he. He sprang to his feet and took one step down from the throne.

"Now, by the gods of the gateway," he cried, "thou shalt not so flout Helicon!" All forgetful that she could not understand a word, he raged at the girl. "I say that thou shalt stay in Sardanes as I will, and thy wanderer in strange places shall wander forth without thee, or—"

There Kalin interrupted.

"O prince, think well before thou speakest. Wouldst thou, the prince of great and ancient Sardanes, mate with a woman outlander of whom thou knowest naught? What will thy people think?"

"And, O prince, think well again before thou sayest that which thou canst not recall," broke in Polaris. "For I, Polaris of the Snows, tell thee that this thing shall not be, though thou wert forty times prince. I swear it by no dark portals of the future,

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but on the honor of an American gentleman!"

"A truce to thy interfering tongue, priest!" said Helicon furiously. "And thou, man of the wilderness, bridle thy tongue also, lest it be curbed for thee. In Sardanes Helicon is the master."

One of the nobles, a middle-aged man, who had started from his seat, now made himself heard. "O prince," he said anxiously, "I tell thee that Kalin hath the right. It is not meet that thou shouldst take to wife this woman from we know not where, who hath come among us. Let her go, and the man with her, lest harm befall. See, already the people murmur."

It was true. Down in the great hall, where the gathered Sardanians had listened breathless, arose now a babel of voices in protest.

"Garlanes, be thou silent also," said Helicon, but the prince could not turn a deaf ear to the murmurs of the people. He sank back in his seat, and for a space rested his chin on his hand. At length he spoke again in a low, choked voice.

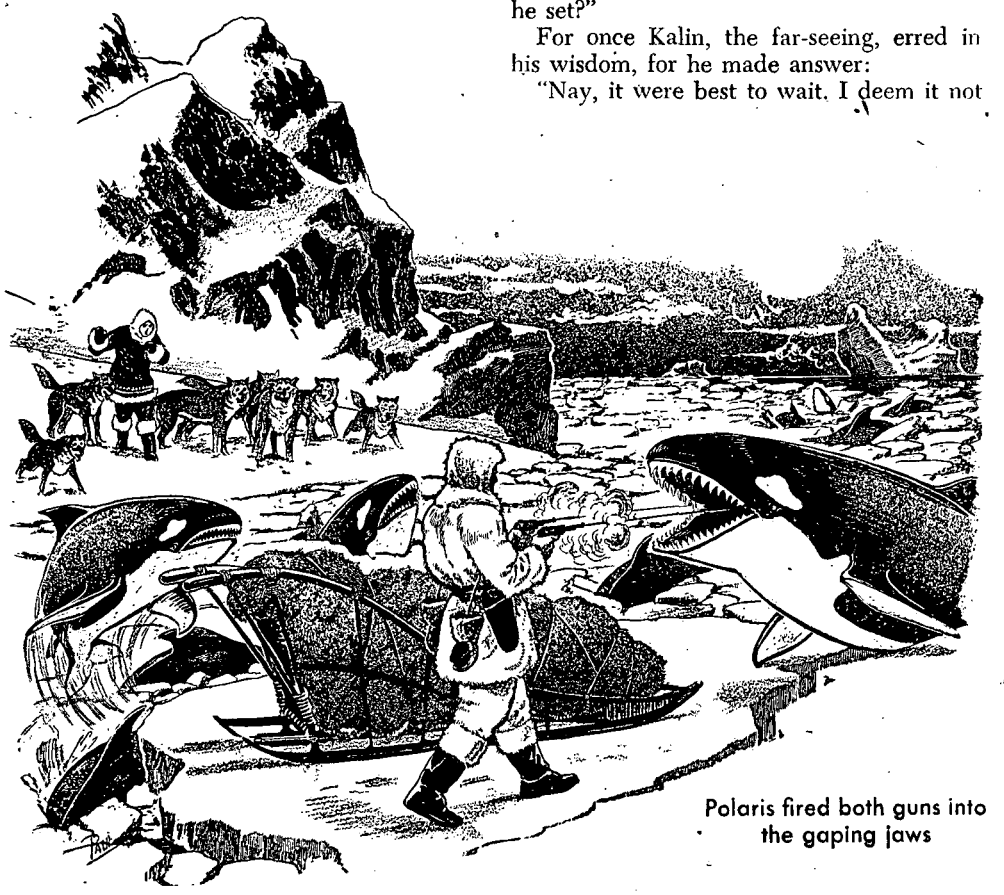
"Not that I fear thee, outlander; nor thee, priest; but it shall be as the people wish. Now get thee gone, thou and the woman. In the time of ten sleeps will Helicon answer thee, after he hath taken counsel with his nobles and his people. Then will he say whether thou shalt go or stay. Go hence until that time and abide in peace with Kalin."

As the Sardanians measured time by sleeping and waking, and not by days, in a land where the days were six months long, it would be ten ordinary days until the prince made his decision.

On their way back to the Gateway to the Future, Polaris said to Kalin: "Now what shall hinder that I be gone before the time he set?"

For once Kalin, the far-seeing, erred in his wisdom, for he made answer:

"Nay, it were best to wait. I deem it not



Polaris fired both guns into the gaping jaws

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unlikely that the prince will act in despite of the wishes of the nobles and of the people. In any case, he is a faithful man, and no harm will come to thee in the time he hath named."

CHAPTER XIII

POLARIS HUNTS THE BEAR

NEITHER Polaris nor the girl was contented to rest all the hours away on the grassy terraces of the gateway, but wandered together through the valley, learning more of its wonders. Everywhere they found industry. Men and women worked in their little farm plots and vineyards, tending the fruits and grains in which the valley was rich; many of them akin to those known in the outside world, and others which would have made a life study for a botanist.

In all Sardanes the work was so apportioned that the products of the soil and of the craftsman supplied evenly the demands of the valley dwellers. In one section lived and labored the weavers and the dyers of cloths; in another the makers of sandals and articles of leather; and in a roomy stone smithy they found Kard the Smith and his men, the workers in metal, beating out buckles and jewelry, daggers, spears, and implements of many other uses.

Not many of the smiths were necessary, for the metal in which they worked was of incredible hardness and durability, and was tempered by the smiths to a fineness beyond any steel. It was that which had first attracted the attention of Polaris in the Hunter's Road, when he found the dagger of Kard gleaming in the snowpath. Ilium it was named, and it was mined from the volcanic rock far up in the mountainside.

Other metals were found in the rocks, but none of a quality to compare with ilium, or none that had its iridescent beauty.

Gems they also knew, and many an ornament worn by the Sardanian men and maids flashed with bright stones. One variety, of a wonderful rich, red luster, Rose Emer thought were rubies, but she was not enough versed in gem learning to be sure. If they were rubies, they were of immense value, for they were of large sizes, and most of them were flawless to their depths.

On the wall in the library of Kalin the priest hung a necklace of such, containing a full score of magnificent stones, each of many carats weight, fairly well cut into facets by the Sardanian lapidaries who had fashioned them. Each stone was set in a ring of the glittering ilium, attached one to another with links of the metal.

One innovation the strangers took into the valley that was hailed with acclaim. Until the advent of Polaris and Rose Emer not a button was known in the length of the land. Everything sartorial was fastened with buckles.

Sardanian craftsmen and housewives were quick to note the uses of the perforated disks, and buttons were straightaway the new fashion, and were sewn on all garments. When enough were placed to answer their purpose of holding things together still more were added for ornament, until some of the Sardanian robes bore no distant likeness to the creations of a Parisian modiste, with their rows of holeless buttons.

ON THE fifth day after their interview with the Prince Helicon, Kard the Smith came to the gateway to repay their visit, and to bring an invitation to Polaris to go out with a party of the hunters along the Hunters' Road to the edge of the wilderness to hunt the white bear.

Six Sardanians made up the hunting-party, of whom two were Kard the Smith and Morolas, one of the tall brothers of Helicon. All were armed with spears tipped with ilium blades, axes, and daggers, and they drove with them a four-pony sledge, with which to take home their game.

Much as Polaris would have liked to take with him the seven dogs, he did not, for he dared not risk the lives of the animals in the fierce sport. With the death of his dogs would die also his last chances of winning back on the way to the North.

Some hours along the snow-path they discovered the first signs of the game which they sought, the white bear. The sledge was halted and the ponies outspanned. One of the Sardanian hunters was left to keep the camp, and the rest of the party set out on the fresh trail.

Less than a mile away across the snow hummocks they came in sight of their quarry, a magnificent specimen of the king of the pole lands, sleek and fat and powerful from the good feeding he had found in the temperate vicinity of the smoky hills.

"There is the bear. Now, stranger of the snows, how dost thou take him?" said Mo-

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rolas. "I understand that thou hast taken many of his kind single-handed—unless indeed that necklace of thine was plucked from dead bones."

Paying no attention whatever to the open sneer in the words of the prince, Polaris made his preparation. He was too much pleased with the prospect of the action before him to be nettled by the peevishness of the Sardanian prince. Smilingly he loosened the long knife in his belt, took a firm grip of his spear, one of his own steel-bladed shafts, and crept forward across the snows where the monster awaited the coming of the foe.

For the bear had seen them, and paused, grumbling and sniffing, to discover if these new animals might not be worth his trouble as a meal.

PLENTY of temper had that bear. Before the man was within thirty feet of him he stopped the slow swaying of his massive head, emitted a snarling roar, and charged. Polaris stood at the dip of a slope in the snow, alert and watchful for his chance to leap and thrust.

As the avalanche of angry bear dashed down the incline its claws slipped on an icy crusting, and it rolled, folding its head in almost to its belly, like a huge snowball, scratching furiously at the snow crust to stop itself and regain its footing.

Straight at the man it shot, and as it reached him he sprang aside.

The same mischance that had upset the animal now proved the undoing of the man's well-aimed thrust. As he drew back his arm to strike, Polaris felt his feet flying from under him.

By exercising all of his tigerish agility he prevented himself from rolling right under the ponderous body of his antagonist. Backward he threw himself, struck a softer spot in the snow crust, and disappeared in it up to his shoulders.

Had Bruin stopped to consider his predicament, that would have been a tight situation for Polaris; but the enraged mountain of flesh paid no further attention to him. Instead he scrambled to his feet at the foot of the slope, snarling more viciously than ever because of his downfall, and charged on into the group of Sardanians.

Before they could realize what was happening, and that Polaris had failed to wound or turn the animal, he was upon them. They scattered, thrusting their spears as they leaped from the path of the monster.

One of them, Kard the Smith, was not so fortunate as the rest. He stood directly in the path of the charge. As he leaped to one side a huge paw whirled in the air and one of the curved talons caught in the slack of his rough tunic, hurling him down as a mouse is spun from the claw of a cat. Before his companions could return to his aid the bear was tearing at the prostrate body of the smith.

As soon as he fell through the snow crust Polaris threw himself forward on his face along the surface, seeking a spot that would allow him to stand upright. In an instant he was on his feet and forward in the wake of the furious bear. His spear had fallen from his hand when he broke into the soft snow, and had glided away over the glary crust for many feet. There was no time to regain it if he was to aid Kard. Plucking the knife from his belt, he rushed in.

Seeming to sense the new danger, the bear whirled on its haunches, and, holding the body of the Sardanian beneath it with one forepaw, struck out madly at Polaris with the other.

Polaris evaded the sweep of the blow by the smallest margin. He had thrown off his gloves, and he caught the long hair on the flail-like paw with his left hand. As the bear drew in his paw to deliver another buffet, the man came with it.

Never in all his bear fights had he come to grips with one of the antarctic monarchs from the front in this wise; but there was no help for it if he would save the smith. He was swept in against the wide chest of the animal, and its terrible front paws were closed to crush him as it raised one armed hind leg to rip him with its down-stroke, and at the same time strove to bend its head down and tear with its jaws.

Menaced by the triple attack, Polaris threw his left arm over his head and jammed his elbow into the throat of the bear below the angle of its jaw, thrusting upward with all the power of his body. At the same instant, quick as a wrestler, he passed one leg over the rising hind leg of the bear.

For the space of an eye flicker the two stood, statuesque, in the snow. Then the man jerked back his shoulders, raised his right arm, and buried the long knife in the white throat.

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Twice he stabbed home, and, feeling the clutching forepaws slacken, let himself go limp, slid from the embrace of the bear, and sprawled in the snow alongside the smith. He seized Kard, and with him rolled from under the toppling, roaring mass of the enemy, which floundered in the snow.

It was the end for the bear, however. Tearing in agony at its wounded throat, it reared again and fell backward, struggling terribly in the release of life.

All had happened in a matter of seconds. Kard, snatched from the very jaws of death, stood gaping at the dying bear, unhurt aside from a bad scare. Beside him, Polaris, his white surcoat streaked with blood, stooped and cleaned his knife in the snow. The other Sardanians trooped back somewhat sheepishly, all of them eyeing Polaris with manifest admiration—all save Morolas, whose face was flushed, and in whose eye was an ugly glint of anger or annoyance.

"Methinks thou wert somewhat late, stranger," he growled, "and nearly was Kard gathered to his fathers because of thy clumsiness."

In the face of the facts, the futility of his remark caused Polaris to laugh aloud. "In second thought I left him to thee, prince," he said, "and did but take up the matter again when I saw thee otherwise occupied."

Morolas framed a hot retort, but thought better of it and swallowed it unsaid. "Methinks thy laughter ill-timed," he muttered grimly to himself. But Kard without a word seized the hand of Polaris, and bent and kissed it. Morolas frowned the more.

Polaris recovered his spear. With thongs the five men dragged the huge carcass of the bear back to where they had left the pony sledge, and loaded it on the sledge.

ONE more bear they met that day, much smaller than the first. It was dispatched easily by the party, who bore it down with their spears. In that conflict the honors fell more to the share of Morolas, and that seemed partially to restore his temper.

In Morolas dwelt a wild and unpleasant spirit, unbridled by the discipline with which Helicon, the prince, controlled himself, and in direct contrast to the sunny soul of his twin brother, Minos, known in Sardanes as the "open-handed."

Presently they returned to the sledge, packed on it the carcass of the second bear, and made ready for their return to the city.

Polaris laid aside his long spear and bent himself to the task of making fast the bulky corpses of their quarry. Where there was work afoot he was never backward. Indeed, in the long, weary years of their lonely life, work and study were all that had kept wholesome the minds and bodies of himself and his father.

While he bent to make fast the last knot the other Sardanians drew away from the sledge. He heard a scuffling in the snow and a sharp cry from Kard the Smith— "It shall not be, Morolas!" followed by a snap like a breaking stick.

Between his left arm and his body a flash of light darted as the sun's rays glittered on the ilium tip of a hurled spear, and the weapon was buried in the side of the carcass which he had been making fast.

He whirled on his heel. Morolas stood with his body still bowed and outstretched arm as he had cast the spear. Kard had sprung in between, and it was his weapon with which he had struck that of the prince that had sounded like a breaking shaft. He had spoiled the aim of Morolas, and surely saved the life of Polaris.

Back of the prince stood the other four hunters with weapons poised.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR THE ROSE OF AMERICA

"I TELL thee, prince, it shall not be!" shouted Kard hoarsely. "He hath saved this day the life of Kard, and he shall not die thus. Look to thyself, thou man of the snows," he flung over his shoulder, "thy death waits!"

"Away, fool!" raged Morolas, and whirled the smith from his path with a sweep of his arm. He snatched a spear from one of the hunters, and would have repeated his cast.

That throw was never made.

All had happened in the space that a man might count ten. In one glance Polaris accepted the situation. His head shot forward, every muscle in his body flexed, his face hardened and under his white-furred frontlet his tawny eyes blazed like molten brass. He leaped from the side of the sledge with lightning swiftness, cleared the space intervening with a single bound, and tore the lifted spear from the hand of Morolas. He threw the weapon on the ground, and

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for an instant the two men faced each other, foot to foot and eye to eye.

Neither spoke. From his superior height the prince glared down at the son of the snows.

With a motion so quick that the eye could not follow the blow, Polaris struck, from the shoulder and with doubled fist. The tall prince crumpled and went down, hurled fully his own length by the fierceness of the blow.

He never moved again. The fist of Polaris, impelled by all the mighty strength stored in his muscles of steel, had struck Morolas full on the breast-bone. Such was the power of the stroke that the man's chest had caved in before it, and his heart had stopped.

He lay scarcely twitching, and the dark blood welled from his lips and stained the white snow.

Never before had Polaris struck a man in anger with his naked hand, and he was momentarily shaken by the result of his own blow. He hesitated but an instant, however, for his blood was up. A Sardanian hunter knelt in the snow by his dead master.

"Gone is Morolas, brother to Helicon the prince," he wailed, and sprang to his feet gnashing his teeth in fury. Kard cried aloud in horror, but he leaped to the side of Polaris, to confront the four hunters. But he struck no blow in defense of his friend; an ilium blade cast by one of the hunters pierced him as he raised spear; and he, too, fell in the snow.

Across Kard's writhing body and the still corpse of Morolas the Prince, leaped Polaris. The four hunters stood in a little group, he who had thrown the spear at Kard slightly in advance of the others.

That fact alone saved the life of Polaris. Before the unarmed hunter could spring aside and give his comrades space in which to throw, the man of the snows was upon them, a death-dealing fury. He caught the first man by the shoulders, and by sheer strength swung him from the ground and dashed him against his fellows. Head-on, he threw the hunter, and the skull of the flying man crashed against the head of the man next him with sickening force.

Only two antagonists were left to confront him.

An ilium spear swished past his head. He caught it out of the air, and the man who had cast it died with it in his heart. Those Sardanians were of fighting stock; the single remaining man gave back never a step. His spear had been shaken from his hand, but he carried an ilium ax in his belt, and this he whirled up to meet Polaris.

It fell upon thin air. The son of the wilds crouched under its swing like a trained boxer, came up with the Sardanian's guard, and struck once with his long-bladed knife.

The battle was finished. The trampled snow looked like a butcher's shambles.

Polaris stood with clenched hands, his face set like a stone. Under other circumstances he might have felt remorse; he certainly would have been moved to mercy. But he had been trapped like an animal, and he joyed in the fierceness of the conflict, and felt no sting of regret for the men he had slain.

A voice called his name weakly from be-

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hind. He turned and beheld Kard the Smith, not yet sped. He had dragged himself to his knees, and was clutching at the great spear that was set in his side.

"Polaris of the Snows," he gasped, "Kard dies for thee, who this day saved Kard from the beast. Kard dies a traitor—to Sardanes's prince. Haste thee—stranger—get thy strange snow runners—get them—from Kalin! Methinks the priest loves thee. He will aid thee—to escape. Go—Helicon holds the Rose. Go—whilst thou mayest. Helicon planned—that thou—shouldst die—this day—but—one Kard—turned traitor. Farewell!"

POLARIS knelt in the red snow and supported the body of the dying smith. Twice the Sardanian essayed to speak again and could not. His head rolled back, and he, too, was sped.

A strange sight was Polaris as he stood up from the corpse of Kard, his white fur surcoat besprinkled with the blood of men and beasts, his handsome face scarred by his terrible anger, his tawny eyes blazing and his broad chest rising and falling in gasps, as cold fear and hot wrath beset him together.

If he had ever doubted his love for the girl so strangely met, the griping fear that strangled his heart and choked his throat put all doubt to flight.

"Helicon holds the Rose," he muttered through his whitened lips. "What saidst thou, Kard? That I must escape? Nay, Kard; death shall find me in thy valley of Sardanes, or I shall find Helicon, thy prince, and the Rose. Yesterday, or was it many yesterdays agone?—it was all for the North. Now it is all for the Rose. I come, dear heart; I come, to win, or to die in the losing!"

He leaped to the sledge, tore away the thongs that bound the carcasses of the dead bears and rolled them into the snow alongside the dead men. He inspanned the four horses, sprang into the driver's seat, shook out the many-molded lash and drove back toward Sardanes, as though hell's door had opened and loosed its legion of furies along the Hunters' Road behind him.

Midway in his dash to the city he halted the horses and sprang down. With nose well down to catch the scent from the trail, and with his plumed tail aflaunt as he galloped, a great gray dog toiled out through the snows to meet him.

"What, Marcus? You, too, have fought and bled!" he cried, as his loyal servant leaped upon him, whining for the joy of the meeting. The shoulder of the dog was gashed by a keen edge, so that his blood had run down and dried on his breast and legs. And on the throat and jowl of Marcus was other blood.

"Now, do you alone live of all your tribe, Marcus? Shame on you, Marcus, if you deserted to find your master while the fighting pack died for the Rose! Or did it fall some other way that you alone come to meet me?"

Wondering much and fearing more, he flung the dog onto the sledge and again lashed the ponies into a mad run. Snow fell, and they dashed on through the storm, the man ever plying the long lash, the dog riding behind him, reared, and with his paws on the man's shoulders, both looking ahead, where the smoke curled around the mighty mountain-tops.

When they came to the pass gashed in the foothills, where the snow waves broke at the lips of the warm slopes, Polaris outspanned the outworn ponies, and dismissed them with a parting crack of the long whip. Freed of their burdens, the tired little beasts scuttled away up the rocky hillsides, betaking themselves to soft pastures, to forget the voice of the lash and the galling harness.

Polaris and Marcus climbed the pass, and stood again at the brink of the ledge of rock that overlooked the valley. Below them in the sunshine lay Sardanes, never more peaceful. Men were working in the fields, women singing from the homes and children were at play in the meadows. Under its green bridges the little river rippled to the hill's foot, its waterfall murmuring from the distance.

Above it all, for an instant, Polaris stood gazing down, with no peace of spirit, his heart and brain a red and raging fury. Sardanes's evil genius was at her gates.

Through the forests to the left the man and dog skirted the meadows where none might see them, headed straight to the terraced declivity of the Gateway to the Future. None was there to meet them as they set foot on the last terrace and the house of the priest lay before them; but a welcome sound greeted the ears of Polaris. It was the howling of the dogs, which Marcus would have answered. A stern word silenced him.

At the very threshold of the house of Kalin, the priest met Polaris. His face was

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drawn and anxious and his right hand was bound in a white bandage. At sight of the son of the snows and his gray bodyguard, Kalin started and a strange look passed athwart his melancholy features.

Without setting foot on the door-stone, Polaris called sternly: "Greeting to thee, Kalin the Priest. Tell me, and waste not thy words in the telling, where fares the Rose?"

Kalin threw forth his uninjured hand in a bitter gesture. "The Prince Helicon—" he answered hoarsely, but Polaris broke in:

"Ay, priest, Helicon holds the Rose. I learned as much but shortly. Now if there has been treachery here, I am minded that Marcus shall tear out a traitor's throat! Speak quickly. How falls it that the Rose is gone, that the prince breaks faith and that thou hast allowed it?"

UNMOVED by the threat, Kalin bent his deep eyes on Polaris.

"No traitor dwells here," he answered. "Even now those faithful to me in the valley gather to the rescue of the lady, it may be, though it rend Sardanes with bitter strife. Ay, all that would Kalin attempt, even though he deemed that thou wert dead in the snows, as Helicon hinted. Helicon hath not had his will freely. A priest of Hephaistos lieth yonder in his dwelling with a broken shoulder, and this hand was injured in defense of the Rose. Kalin did but yield to force, that he might later win by craft. Thy words do Kalin small honor, thou who are as the brother of Kalin."

"Thy pardon, Kalin, my words were rash. Consider that the maid is dearer to me than aught I may hope to attain in the world, and this thing that hath been done hath brought upon me a rage like unto nothing I have ever known. Now tell me what thou mayest accomplish in my aid, for I go hence to find Helicon the Prince."

"Mine is half of the fault, brother," Kalin answered. "I should have foreseen, but I guessed not that Helicon was mad enough for this. Wide was the rift between us before; it hath passed all bridging now. As I have said, many of the people hold to the ancient sway of the priesthood of Hephaistos, and murmur at the changes which Helicon would have. Already my messengers are among them, calling them to my aid. Hadst thou not come, in a short space Kalin would have been on his way to the Judgement House. It was ordered that thou shouldst die this day on the Hunters' Road. How hast thou won free?"

"Kard the Smith owed me somewhat, and could not stomach my killing. He took a dead thrust for his hindrance. Yet did he warn in time, and Morolas and four hunters keep him company whither he traveleth," Polaris answered simply.

Then Kalin told him how Helicon the Prince had come to the gateway and taken Rose Emer thence by force. Kalin had made opposition, even to raising his hand against the prince. In a scuffle, wherein he was supported by one of his priests, he had been wounded in the hand by the dagger of the prince, and the priest had been hurled to the ground, so that his shoulder was cracked.

"Only we two were here to oppose him," said Kalin, "and he had others with him. Had I persisted, I had been slain by him in his fury. So I submitted that I might be left to befriend the Rose. And she, she loosed the great dog before she was taken, and set him forth on thy trail. One of Helicon's men gashed him with a spear, and he would have turned and given battle to all of them, but Rose urged him on."

"And how went the Rose—calmly, or struggling and crying?" asked Polaris, his jaws clinching at the thoughts called up by the words of Kalin.

"Nay, with head held high, tearless and saying nothing went the Rose," the priest answered him. "The lady hath greatness of spirit. She went in anger, but gave not way to fear."

"Now we go to visit this prince of thine," said Polaris. He called Marcus and shut the dog, protesting, with his fellows in the stable. "Well would you like the fight with me, if fight there is to be, I know, my Marcus, but I dare not risk you," he muttered.

He ran to his room in the house of the priest. When he came forth there swung from his waist his father's brace of heavy revolvers and the filled cartridge belt, and in his hand he bore the brown rifle. He had also an ilium-bladed spear, and in its sheath at his hip gleamed the long dagger of Kard the Smith, that he had taken from the corpse of the stout Sardanian.

He counted much on his firearms now. Here were weapons of which even Kalin knew not the secret.

Among the few books in the cabin of his father was one which Polaris had read and reread, and which, as boy and man, he had

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liked best of them all. It was the "Ivanhoe" of Sir Walter Scott. He had wondered much on its story of chivalry and battle in a far-off time. Unconsciously much of his own language was couched in its quaint terms.

Now, as he set forth, to fight, or to fall, if need be, for the lady of his heart, there came to him a strange conceit, born of the old romance.

Armed and ready, he stood at the top of the terrace, and while the priest wondered, he raised his voice in his own tongue, not loudly, but firmly and clearly, in the first battle cry ever heard in the valley of Sardanes:

"For the Rose of America! Polaris to the rescue!"

Together he and Kalin passed down the terraced slopes of the Gateway to the Future.

CHAPTER XV

HEPHAISTOS CLAIMS A SACRIFICE

KALIN carried a bundle in his hand, and as they reached the thickets at the foot of the hill he paused.

"Now, for our purpose thou must go unknown of men. Thou canst hide thyself in one of these."

He shook out his bundle, and revealed two of the long sable robes of his priestly order. He threw one of them over Polaris and donned the other. They were loose and cowled, and covered both men entirely.

"As a priest of Hephaistos thou goest," said Kalin. "Thou must leave the spear, but that strange club of thine thou mayest hide beneath the robe."

"Nay, I can take the spear also," answered Polaris, and snapped the stout shaft off short in his hands, so that the weapon was rendered little longer than the rifle, and he could hide both of them under the garment.

"Priest," he said, as they started across the meadows toward the bridge, "but shortly I said that in anger which I fain would recall, for twice thou hast shown thyself a true man."

Kalin waved his hand deprecatingly. "It is forgotten, as though it were not," he said with one of his rare and melancholy smiles "Thou art as my brother."

"But now," persisted Polaris, "we fare on an errand to which thy feeling of brotherhood doth not bind thee. Why goest thou into danger with me, Kalin, into danger that may end in death, thou, who art of this land, and its priest?"

Kalin halted and regarded him strangely. "Say, thou, Polaris, thou lovest Rose?" he questioned. Into the face of the man of the snows the red blood flamed afresh.

"Ay, so it seemeth—unto death," he said simply.

The priest nodded slowly. "And the Rose—doth she return thy love, my brother?" he asked.

Then was Polaris silent for a long moment. "Nay," he answered at length. "Nay, Kalin, the love of the Rose is not mine. Somewhat I have guessed, and the rest her own words have made plain. There is a man—a brave American—" the words cost him an effort, "whom she loveth, and whom she will wed. He leadeth the party with which she came hither. He fareth forth on a dangerous quest, to return in honor and greatness to his own land—and the Rose—" He stopped.

Again Kalin looked strangely into his eyes. "And to save her for another thou darest all, even to thy life?"

"Ay, the man is worthy. And that she loveth me not, should my love for her be less that I should falter in her service? No, Kalin, that is not the way of Polaris," answered the son of the snows.

"And when thou hast won her way home, as I think thou wilt—for thou darest all things, and the high gods love those greatly daring—what then?"

"I have a duty laid on me, in the far North; and then— I know not."

Once again his strange smile passed over the face of Kalin the priest. "Now, thou Polaris, we indeed are brothers in all. Know that I, too, love the Rose, and would die even as thou wouldst, to save her, even to save her for another—but I had hoped that the other might be thee—I dearly hoped it. Nor that it may not be, lesseneth not the measure of the service of Kalin."

Polaris held out his hand, and his eyes were very bright as their fingers clasped.

"Kalin, my brother, may the gods set our feet in the same path, wherever it leadeth," he said.

As they proceeded toward the Judgment House they saw that many Sardanians were gathered there, and ever among the throng passed back and forth the black-robed figures of the priests of the gateway.

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Kalin stationed Polaris by a pillar in the great hall, not far from the platform.

"Stay thou there, brother, and be silent, unless great need cometh," he said, and passed up the steps to his black stone seat near the throne.

A friendly murmur arose from the Sardanians in the hall when they saw the priest throw aside his robe and take his seat. That something untoward was on foot it was easy to guess. All over the hall, the voices of men were raised in discussion, and chiming with them the voices of women also. And ever from group to group passed the priests of Kalin, exhorting here and rebuking there, setting the stage for the denouément planned by their master.

PRESENTLY entered Garlanes and a group of Sardanian nobles, among whom towered Minos, the brother of the prince—Minos, whose twin brother lay stiffening in the snow in the Hunters' Road. Then, after some delay, came Helicon himself.

As the prince ascended the steps to his throne, Polaris leaned forward from his sheltering pillar, his whole frame taut as a bowstring, the hand that held the brown rifle clenched so that it seemed that the steel barrel itself would crumple in his terrible grip.

Helicon's face was darkly clouded. He did not glance once in the direction of Kalin, but sat a while in thought, and in all the hall was silence. His musing ended, the prince raised his head.

"Wherefore do the people of Sardanes gather in the Judgment House and summon their ruler?" he asked harshly, and bent his stern gaze on the people below the platform.

None answered him. He smiled grimly, and again he questioned: "What matter would Sardane's people bring before Sardane's prince? Speak."

"Of all the lands in the world," declared Polaris, "America is the greatest—and hath no prince nor king"

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From among the people rose a subdued murmur, a note of protest, but no man was bold enough to voice it. In a silence that followed Helicon sat impatiently, his fingers twitching on the stone arms of his throne.

From his seat Kalin the priest rose and stepped to the foot of the throne.

"Thy people murmur because of a deed that to them seemeth ill, Helicon the Prince," he said. He paused, and behind him in the hall rose another murmur of support from the people.

"They are assembled in the Judgment House to beg that Helicon the Prince shall sit in judgment on himself and render answer," continued Kalin. "Thy people murmur because thou wouldst take to wife an alien woman and place her with thee on the throne of Sardanes, supplanting the right of a daughter of Sardanes.

"They murmur," the priest raised his voice slightly, in a note of accusation, "because thou hast reft her from the hospitality of Sardane's priest with violence, under a broken pledge, and that thou hast lifted thy hand against the priests of Sardanes, the ministers of the mighty Lord Hephaistos of the Gateway, who speak the word of Hephaistos in Sardanes—"

"Enough, priest!" shouted Helicon, red with rage. "Cease thy slander of Sardane's ruler!" He turned his eyes on the Sardanians in the hall. "Helicon, Prince of Sardanes, rendereth account to no man," he cried. "It is his will that he weddeth with the Rose maiden. Let the man who gainsaith look to himself!"

As the voices of the people were raised in an angry babel of protest, he lifted his hand.

"Beware," he cried, his voice ringing through the hall. "Take warning! Helicon rules in Sardanes. Bitter shall be the punishment meted out to him that opposeth the will of the prince."

Before his fierce eyes the people fell silent again, and he turned again to Kalin.

"As for thee, priest," he said hoarsely, "get thee back with thy black-robed crew, to thy station, and attend thy priestly duties. Attend them well. Too long hath thy priesthood interfered in the affairs of Sardanes. It shall be so no longer. Go, ere I am moved to lessen thy number by one meddler!"

He glared at the priest, and men in the hall stood all aghast at his words. Many there were of the priest's party, but they knew that many others were for the prince and against the priest, and none knew to what lengths Helicon might go in his anger.

STILL at the foot of the throne Kalin stood undaunted, and holding his last card in the game. A bitter smile came to his lips, and his voice was low and deep as he answered:

"Prince, thou growest mad, who would override the will of thy people and dare the anger of the god. It is the will of the god, as it is the will of the people that thou shalt wed a maid of Sardanes."

Assuming for his own purposes that he was unaware of the fate which had been intended for Polaris, he continued:

"When the stranger with whom the maid came hither returneth from the hunt, then he shall take her and fare again to the north, as they wish—"

Helicon, secretly worried because of the long absence of Morolas and his party, yet not dreaming of the end of their mission, broke in again.

"The stranger cometh not again to Sardanes. He hath left the maid, and fared alone on his road to the north. I will wed the maid. I, Helicon, have said it, and it shall be."

"Have thy hunters then returned?" asked Kalin pointedly.

"Be thou silent, priest!" roared Helicon. Another thought flashed into his mind. "Tarry thou here, for there shall be work for thee." He turned to his brother Minos. "Go thou and fetch the Rose maid hither," he said.

Kalin stood back with folded arms, his head held high. In all the hall was no sound, save the suppressed breathing of the people. Smiling, as was his wont, the tall Minos left the hall through the pillared entrance behind the throne. Helicon sat glowering, with his chin on his hand, until he heard Minos returning.

Then he sprang to his feet and stepped from the throne to the floor of the platform, fronting Kalin.

Minos and Rose Emer came into the hall. The girl's face was white, but she did not falter as she advanced with Minos and stood near Helicon. Only once her face lighted as she saw Kalin; then she turned her eyes, and through the pillared façade of the Judgment House she scanned anxiously the reaches of the valley.

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The heart of Polaris bounded as, crouched behind his pillar, he followed the course of that gaze. She was looking for him to return —he would not fail her!

"Now, whether it be the will of the god or of the people, or of the maid herself, I, Helicon, will wed the Rose," said the prince shortly. "And thou, Kalin, of whom and of whose pratings I tire sadly, thou art still priest in Sardanes—thou shalt wed us—now! Proceed!"

An enigmatical smile overspread the face of the priest. Full in the eyes of the angry prince he looked as he towered scarce a yard away.

"Thou goest far in thy folly, Helicon," he said, and there was a note of pity in his low tones. Then he raised his voice. "I wed thee not, nor shall such a marriage ever be!"

Helicon hissed a direction into the ear of Minos, and the tall prince, still smiling, stepped toward the edge of the platform and fronted the people in the lower section of the hall with dagger drawn and spear aloft. Helicon snatched his own ilium blade from his girdle and leaped on Kalin.

He caught the priest by the shoulder, and sought to crush him to his knees; but, great as was his strength, he could not bend the wiry form to his will. Kalin stood firm.

One searching glance he sent down the hall, where men were shouting and urging forward, and where the foremost were held back by the menace of Minos. Then the priest turned his gaze back to the face of Helicon.

Up flashed the bright blade in the hand of the prince and quivered over the heart of Kalin. "Choose, priest; choose or die!" he shouted hoarsely. "Wed Helicon to the Rose and go hence, or refuse and perish—and thy religion shall give way to a better!"

"Strike, fool, and thou darest," said Kalin contemptuously, and lifted no hand to save himself.

Along the the great arm of the prince the muscles tightened. The blade came flashing down. Midway in his stroke Helicon shuddered. The knife clattered on the stone floor. A crashing roar reverberated through the judgment chamber, and a cloud of dark smoke floated upward.

Helicon crashed down on his back with widespread arms—dead!

A groan of awe rose in the hall. Everywhere men fell on their knees and covered their faces. Even Kalin, greatly shaken, knelt. Rose Emer swayed where she stood, and stretched out her arms with a glad cry of "Polaris!"

With his cowl thrown back from his golden head and his topaz eyes flaming, Polaris strode onto the platform. Under the black robe he clutched the smoking rifle.

CHAPTER XVI

HEPHAISTOS HATH SPOKEN

FROM his hiding-place behind the pillar Polaris had watched and listened, leaving matters to the diplomacy of Kalin, hoping against hope that the priest might persuade Helicon from his blind desires. When he realized that the priest had failed he had crept forward from pillar to pillar up the hall.

While all men watched tensely the scene on the platform, and none noted him, he had swung himself up on the dais, and stood behind the pillar at its edge, watchful and with finger on trigger. Even then he had held his hand until the last second of time that would avail to save his friend.

As he reached her side, Rose Emer collapsed with a shuddering cry, and he caught her swooning body with his left arm.

Of all the Sardanians, Kalin was first to command himself. Kalin, the quick-witted, alone guessed that his aid came not from the god of his people, although for a moment he, too, had bowed before what had seemed to him the supernatural. He remembered the strangely fashioned "club" which Polaris had borne from the mountain, and turned it to his purposes.

Without rising from his knees he tossed his hands above his head and cried out:

"The voice of the god hath spoken! I thank thee, Lord Hephaistos! Thou hast upheld thy servant."

Sardanians heard the words of their priest, and they believed. Nor were Sardanian nerves stout enough to withstand such a startling manifestation of the deity. With one accord the people broke from the hall like sheep, and the nobles fled from one pat-form. Even the sable-robed priests tarried not for another greeting from their god, but scurried away with the rest.

Only one man fled not. That was the great Prince Minos, now ruler of Sardanes. From where he had knelt at the edge of the dais he arose and came, smiling no longer, to

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where his brother lay, and knelt again with bowed head, paying heed to naught else; for Minos had loved his brother.

With a silent gesture Kalin bade Polaris accompany him.

Rose Emer still lay limp in his arms. He lifted her like an infant and followed the priest. Back to the Gateway to the Future they went without pausing; nor did they in all of the way thither encounter a single Sardanian. The wrath of Hephaistos was abroad in the land, and his people prayed in their homes.

Far ahead of them hurried the little band of Kalin's priests, and climbed the mountainside to their temple. None looked back.

Polaris handed the rifle and the spear to Kalin, that he might the more easily carry the girl. As they proceeded he explained to the priest the agency which had saved him and slain the prince.

"And in this tube lieth a death that striketh at a distance?" said the priest curiously. "Well, brother, thou hast paid the score that lay between us, and the score also that lay between the twain of us and Prince Helicon. Truly, it was an ill day for Sardane's prince when Kard brought thee and the Rose maid into the valley."

"For one purpose only have I killed," said Polaris solemnly. "The deaths of the men I have slain may not be counted against me. Gladly would I have gone hence without bloodshed, but they stood blind to justice. I take the Rose safely from Sardanes again —peacefully, if may be—but I take her, though it cost the lives of a hundred men."

Shortly after they had crossed the river the girl's senses returned to her, and she had opened her eyes for a brief instant, and had then closed them again.

Softly she lay in the arms of the young giant who carried her so easily. Very close to hers was his handsome face. Very far away and faint was the face of the American captain. Unconsciously she nestled closer in the strong arms, and on his broad shoulder her head turned closer to his.

POLARIS fought a conflict, short and sharp, as he carried Rose Emer up the terraced slopes of the Gateway to the Future. It was a battle fiercer by far than any that he had waged with the Sardanians, and within himself were both the friend and the foe. With that soft, warm, yielding body in his arms, the dear, proud little head at rest on his shoulder, with the perfume of her hair in his nostrils, with her whole ineffable attraction lying about him, never stronger than now, like the meshes of a magic net, Polaris was going quite mad.

Lower and nearer he bent his head. Kalin, unseeing, stalked on ahead. Nearer yet. The perfumed hair brushed his cheek.

Wild thoughts crowded one another through his brain. Why should he face the long, hard way to the north? Was there not here a kingdom ready to a strong hand—to his hand, with the aid of the priest? Youth, a kingdom to take for a little fighting, and the queen of his heart to queen it in the kingdom—what more in reason might any man ask?

Lower yet his head bent as he strode, and wild birth and bitter spirit of the barren years strove in the man's soul with book-learned chivalry and an old man's spoken precepts.

Yet was the end of the struggle a foregone conclusion. A few short days back it would have been different. Despite his strange culture, Polaris had been little better than a barbarian. The impulses in his breast were those of the primal man, and might not for long be fettered by half-learned lessons of the brain. And then came the woman and love. All of the loose strands of his being, although he knew it not, were gathered together and held in one small, soft white hand.

So, ere ever it was fought, his battle was decided.

Her hair brushed his cheek. His head swam dizzily. He knew not if he walked or staggered. Her breath intoxicated him. Their lips met, only a touch, light as the brushing of birds in flight, but it thrilled the man like racing fire.

He started in every affrighted nerve. He dared not know that her lips had answered to his touch. He dared not look at her face, swooned as he believed her. With cheeks aflame, he strode on toward the house of the priest, and did not discover the fiery signal raised in answer to his own.

Dim-eyed, he laid her on the stone bench at the priest's door, while he brought water to dash in her face. But when he came with it he found her recovered and sitting upright, with hands pressed tightly to her face. Covered as he was with his own confusion, he did not notice that which might have

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spared them both much trouble in the days to come.

Following a succession of events which few men in the world could have encountered, the steel-sinewed son of the snows now went on guard at the house of Kalin while the priest and the girl slept, both of them worn from their experiences in the last few hours. When they were refreshed Polaris took his rest, and the priest stood watch. They dared not relax vigilance, and there was none they might trust utterly, except themselves.

They pressed their preparations for their departure from the valley. While Kalin gathered secretly all things needed to their journey, Polaris packed the sledge. He mended his harness with care, and with light, tough wood and thongs constructed extra snow-shoes. He also cleaned and oiled his guns, and selected several stout spears.

Beyond a return from the garb of the Sardanians to the stout clothing she had worn from the outer world, the preparations of Rose Emer were few.

WITHIN twenty-four hours from the time of their return to the mountain from the Judgment House, the storm gathered. Hard as they had labored, they were not more than half finished with their work of preparation for departure when Prince Minos climbed the slopes of the gateway. With him came a file of stout Sardanians. Every man of the party was fully armed.

"Yonder cometh trouble in haste," said Polaris, when he noted the approach of the prince and his men. "Go thou and talk with them, brother," he said to Kalin. "My temper groweth short with these Sardanians of thine; the more so with those of the royal breed. And, brother, should thy parley come to an ill end, wave thy hands and cast thyself on thy face, and I will clear the way before thee," and he patted the brown rifle.

"What is the pleasure of the Prince Minos?" asked Kalin, standing at the top of the terrace path as the prince and his men paused in front of him, where the way grew narrow.

Minos made no answer, gazing sternly on Kalin. Old Garlanes, the noble, spoke.

"No words finds Minos, the prince," he said, "for his tongue is stilled with sorrow—sorrow for the deaths of his brethren and with anger that their slayer goeth unpunished."

Kalin's start of surprise was well simulated. "How mean you, Garlanes?" he exclaimed. "The brethren of the prince—".

"Runners have come in who were sent on the trail of a hunting-party. They report the corpses of Morolas, brother to the prince, and five hunters lying in their blood in the Hunters' Road. Aye, they were done to death with violence, and their bodies damaged by the beasts of the wastes.

"Nor does the Prince Minos"—and Garlanes lowered his voice to a mere whisper—"believe that the death of his brother Helicon came from Sardanes's god. On the corpse of the dead Helicon were found two wounds, from which blood had flowed, and from the mouth of one of them there fell this thing."

Garlanes held out his hand with the leaden pellet of a rifle cartridge in it.

"This thing Minos thinketh not of the Lord Hephaistos, but rather of the stranger

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yonder, whom thou harborest. With him, the prince thinketh, thou mayest find others to match this which slew the Prince Helicon. But how he managed to slay Morolas and five other strong men, wounding them all in front, is beyond the power of Minos to guess. And now, O Kalin, he biddeth me say unto you that thou shall render unto us the stranger and the woman, or else we take them by force. Thou wilt give them up to us, or art thou still deluded?"

Kalin raised his hand in a gesture, commanding silence. "Let Kalin ponder on this matter," he said quickly, and bowed his head in thought, while Minos watched him with somber eyes. As he seemed to think the priest turned over and over in his palm the pellet of lead from the rifle of Polaris, and pretended to attach great weight to it.

"Nay, O Minos, my master, and Garlanes, his mouthpiece," said Kalin at length, speaking lowly, so that Polaris might not hear him, "Kalin no longer is blind. He sees that it is even as thou seest. But if these things be true, and the stranger hath power to slay with a noise at a distance, it is likely that his taking will be no easy task, and may cost the lives of many. In anger, or to save himself, he might slay thee, O Minos, and thee, Garlanes."

Deeper grew the frown of Minos. Garlanes shuddered and glanced apprehensively in the direction of Polaris, who sent him a grim and unassuring smile.

"It were better," went on Kalin softly "to leave the matter in the hands of Kalin and of the priests of the gateway. This stranger seemeth to trust us. What many of ye might not accomplish with force may be done by few of us by stealth and cunning. Leave the matter to the servants of Hephaistos. He hath brought dire trouble to Sardanes. For the doing to death of the Prince Helicon and the Prince Morolas and his servants, this stranger from the wilderness of a surety shall die, even though he *did* save the life of Kalin." The voice of the priest became a low hiss. "He and the woman with him shall go through the Gateway to the Future as an offering to the Lord Hephaistos. Kalin hath spoken!"

Minos, the prince, nodded his head slowly. "That were meet, priest," he said, speaking for the first time. "That is the order of Minos. See that it be done, and that quickly; for the blood of my murdered brethren calls to Minos for vengeance. Yes, Kalin, see to it, and much will be forgiven thee of other things wherein Minos hath had caused to doubt."

"When he sleepeth next it shall be done, prince," whispered Kalin.

Minos and his men turned away and descended the terraces, satisfied that the doom of Polaris and the Rose was sealed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE IN THE CRATER

FROM the instant that the towering form of Minos disappeared through the shrubbery of the terrace path, the exertions of Polaris and Kalin were redoubled. In a few hours their preparations for the departure into the wastes were complete.

Cautious as they were, they could not be entirely secret in their goings and comings about the mountain, and many a curious priestly eye was cast upon their doings by the servants of Kalin. One of them, a dark-faced rascal by the name of Analos, more prying than the others, soon discovered not only that the sledge of the strangers was being stocked and provisioned to its full capacity, as though for a journey, but the nature of some of the articles packed upon it made him certain that his master Kalin was to make use of them.

Watchful for an opportunity, the priest Analos skirted the plateau and slipped over the edge of the path.

He was as stealthy as a cat, but Polaris saw him go, and caught a glimpse of his face as he disappeared.

"One of thy priests hath slipped away from thee, Kalin," he said. "Methinks he hastened to Minos with a tale to tell."

They went to the brink of the terrace. Far below them Analos was scuttling for the meadows like a scared rabbit, his priestly gown tucked well about his flying legs.

In the small court in the rear of the house Polaris and Kalin finished their work with the sledge and harnessed to it four of the small Sardanian ponies, to drag it up through the spiral way of the Gateway to the Future; for the path which Kalin purposed they should take led straight through the gateway mountain, and was the only path out of the valley, aside from the north pass, through which they had entered.

Just before they started Kalin summoned his priests and bade them farewell, giving

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them his blessing, which they took with bended knees and bowed heads, and several of them sobbing; for they loved Kalin well. His words forestalled words of surprise or of protest.

"Children of Hephaistos, Kalin goeth hence for a time," he said. "Perchance he will return; perchance thou shalt see his face no more. Let none gainsay his going, for it is of the gods. Now, lest the wrath of Minos lie heavily on thee, in suspicion that thou hast aided in the passing of Kalin and the strangers from Sardanes, get thou gone from the gateway to the valley, and spread diligently the report that Kalin and the strange man cast thee forth, in danger of thy lives. Fare thee well."

In a body the priests descended the terraces. As they stood at the top to see them go, Kalin caught the shoulder of Polaris and pointed over toward the white-walled Judgment House. From its pillared façade streamed forth a line of hurrying Sardanians, and the sun shone brightly on the ilium blades.

"Here come Minos and his men," said the priest shortly. "Take thy last look on the valley of Sardanes, and let it be short."

"Farewell, Sardanes—beautiful, horrible Sardanes," breathed Rose Emer. Then she, too, turned to the flight, and shuddered slightly as she turned.

Then into the darkness of the arched portal and up through the spiraled rocky way they urged the laboring ponies. Rose Emer carried two flaming torches to light the gloom of the way, and the two men bent their shoulders to the aid of the animals. Close at their heels slunk the seven dogs of the pack, with hackles erect and eyes glowing in the half dark of the place, the strangeness of which caused them many a misunderstanding whimper. Stoutly the little horses bent to their work, so that it chanced that they dragged the sledge out of the passage and onto the shelf where were the chapels, at the same time that the first of the runners of Minos leaped from the terrace path to the level of the plateau, many feet below the fugitives.

Polaris turned to the right, where the broad ledge curved away past the chapels along the mighty ellipse of the crater.

"Nay, brother, not that way!" called Kalin. "Here lieth the path," and he turned the horses to the left, where the shelf narrowed at the point where was the perch from which Polaris had witnessed the passing of Chloran, Sardon's son.

So close to the brink of the ledge loomed the bulge of the crater wall that there was but the barest room for the passing of the sledge. It required all of the skill and patience of the men to guide the snorting, frightened ponies. One misstep would have whirled the beasts and sledge into the roaring fire-pit below; but they passed the neck of the pathway without mishap, and, after a few yards' progress, found the way widening and more smooth.

SCARCELY had they passed the narrowest of the path when a shout from behind told them that Minos and his men had emerged from the tortuous spiral in the bowels of the cliffside, and had gained the shelf rim. Then Polaris turned back.

"How far on lieth the vent in the wall of the mountain through which we pass?" he asked of Kalin. The priest told him that it was nearly half-way around the circumference of the crater rim. "Then haste thou on, brother," said Polaris. "Get thee well through the last gate. I will turn back and see what may be done to delay those who are in too great haste behind us."

With a word of explanation to the girl, he took several spears and the brown rifle from the sledge.

Kalin smiled at him grimly through the murk.

"Methinks they will try first the broad way, or divide, and follow both paths," he said, "and they who go by the broad way will be fooled, for it cometh to naught but a bridgeless gap yonder." He pointed across the pit. "Those who come this way, hold thou back as long as may be—and then come thou swiftly, brother, and I will show thee means to close the way behind us."

Polaris ran back along the ledge. He came to the path neck again without encountering any of the pursuers, although their voices sounded from just beyond the bulge of the rock. Catching hand and footholds, he swung himself easily to the perch above the path, crept forward, and peered down at the platform.

Like rats from a hole, fully forty Sardanians had crept up through the winding passage. When they saw the light flaring redly before them they charged forward with a shout, expecting to find their quarry; and then they stood gaping in surprise on

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the red emptiness of the platform, where for centuries no Sardanian had stood, save the priests of the god and those about to die.

In front of the chapels they gathered in a group, the fire vapor from the abyss reflected from their staring faces in ghastly fashion. Only Minos, the prince, tarried not to wonder. Swiftly he paced to the right and to the left, inspecting the ledge with quick glances.

"Haste on the track of the strangers!" he cried. "Of old time have I heard it that through the gateway lieth another path from Sardanes to the wastes. It is that to which the false priest guideth them. Yonder seemeth scant room for their sledge. Let us follow here."

He started along the broader way to the right, and his men, overcoming in part their awe of the fearsome pit at their feet, began to follow; albeit with care, and as far from the edge as they might walk.

"Nay, not all of ye!" called back the prince. "Garlanes, go thou with men and explore the narrower way yonder."

With most of the Sardanians trailing at his back, Minos disappeared in the murk beyond the chapels. Garlanes and fifteen men turned to the pursuit of the narrow path. The old noble moved slowly, as though the task to which he was set was little enough to his taste, and none of his men was over hasty.

In silence Polaris watched the advance. He was minded to stay his hand from strife as long as might be, and, if possible, to frighten the pursuers back long enough to give the priest the time needed to thread the pass with the sledge.

With that plan in mind, he prepared to surprise the men of Garlanes when they should come near enough for his purpose. His trained ears, deafened by the noises from the never silent crater pit, did not tell him of a number of slinking forms that sniffed and crouched along the rock wall and came to a halt almost at the foot of the jutting rock where he crouched.

Foremost of the party of Garlanes was a tall young man. It chanced that, without seeing it, he had come to the beginning of the sinister chute in the floorway of the shelf—that polished slide through which all Sardanians were shot to their fiery ends. At his feet, unnoticed in the half light cast by the flicker, lay one of the wooden shield-like vehicles in which the victims rode to death. Ahead of him the man saw that the way grew suddenly narrower.

He paused and peered under his cupped hand.

Out of the gloom ahead of him came suddenly an ear-splitting rattling, followed by a hiss and a weird moaning that caused the hair at the nape of his neck to stiffen. Immediately the place was in echo to a full throated, hideous chorus, that froze the blood in the veins of the boldest Sardanian who heard it.

COWERING, and with staring eyeballs, the members of the searching party saw their leader shaken in his tracks, apparently crumpled up by an unseen force and whirled from them—out over the abyss of fire. One glimpse only they caught of his flying body, dark against the ruddy glow of the steam and smoke from the crater heart. For an instant the great hollow of the funnel rang with his agonized shrieks as he shot downward, and he was gone.

Only Polaris saw the end. Shaken with horror, he did not neglect to turn to his advantage the accident; for accident it was. As the party of Garlanes came on, he had smitten the wall at his side with the shafts of the spears he carried, and had given vent at the same time to a deep-chested groan. He did not know that the seven of the pack had slunk back on his trail, and crouched at the foot of the rock, ready for battle. Their echoing challenge to the foe startled him almost as much as it did the Sardanians.

The young leader, in the face of that blast of clamor, had started so violently that he struck his shins against the shield of wood at his feet, collapsed into it, and was whirled down the terrible chute to instant death.

Again the Sardanians proved their innate courage. Their companion torn from them and cast to a fate that they could neither see nor explain, his death-shrieks ringing in their ears, they did not break or give back. They stood fast and made ready to advance. From the gloom in front the menacing snarling of the dogs swelled in volume. It was quieted again when spoke the voice of the dreaded stranger from the snows.

"Back, ye men of Sardanes!" thundered Polaris from the height. "Back, ere the fate of him who hath but now passed the gate-

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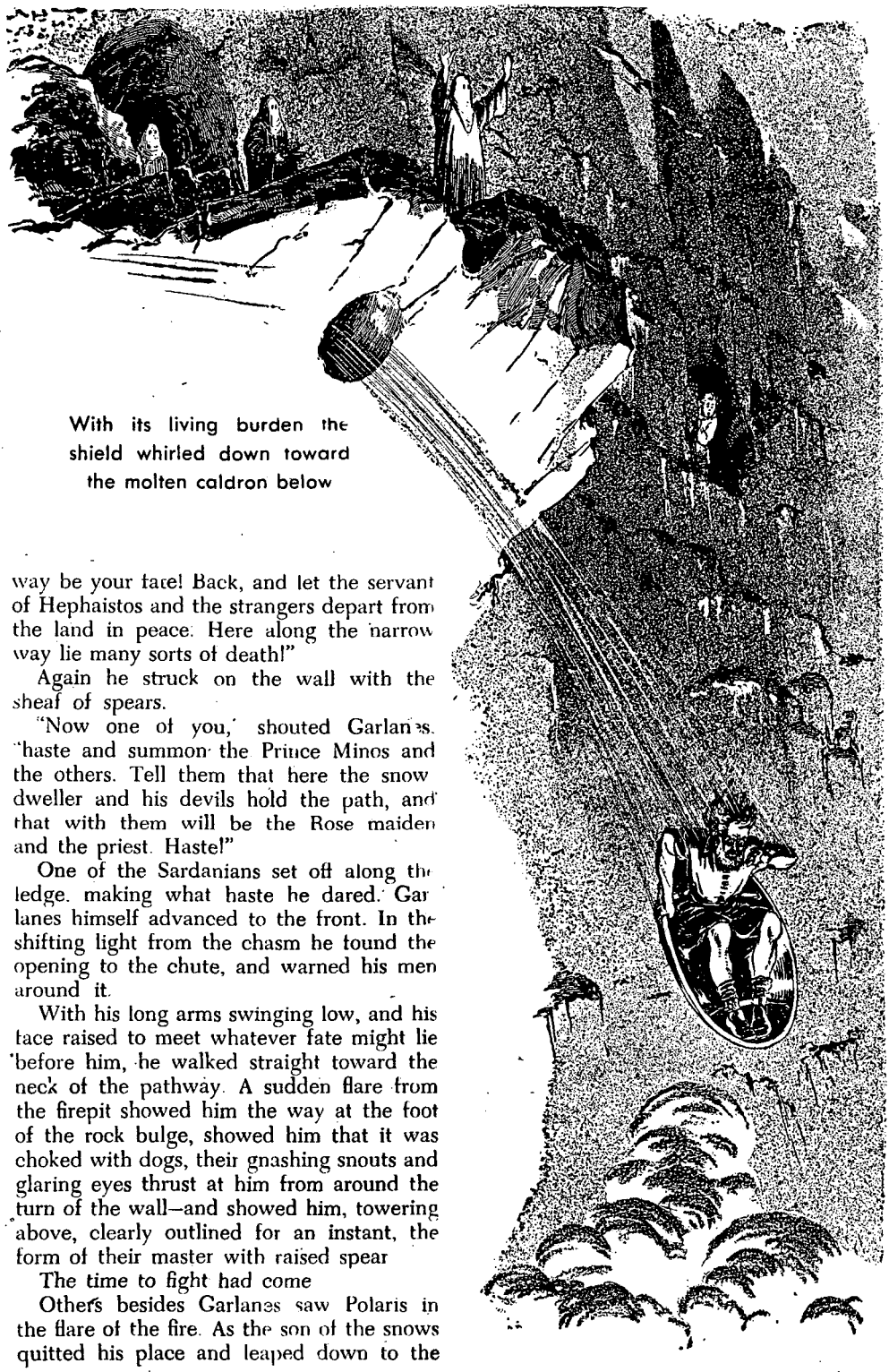

With its living burden the shield whirled down toward the molten caldron below

way be your fate! Back, and let the servant of Hephaistos and the strangers depart from the land in peace. Here along the narrow way lie many sorts of death!"

Again he struck on the wall with the sheaf of spears.

"Now one of you," shouted Garlanes, "haste and summon the Prince Minos and the others. Tell them that here the snow dweller and his devils hold the path, and that with them will be the Rose maiden and the priest. Haste!"

One of the Sardanians set off along the ledge, making what haste he dared. Garlanes himself advanced to the front. In the shifting light from the chasm he found the opening to the chute, and warned his men around it.

With his long arms swinging low, and his face raised to meet whatever fate might lie before him, he walked straight toward the neck of the pathway. A sudden flare from the firepit showed him the way at the foot of the rock bulge, showed him that it was choked with dogs, their gnashing snouts and glaring eyes thrust at him from around the turn of the wall—and showed him, towering above, clearly outlined for an instant, the form of their master with raised spear

The time to fight had come

Others besides Garlanes saw Polaris in the flare of the fire. As the son of the snows quitted his place and leaped down to the

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ledge among the dogs, several spears splintered against the rock wall where he had stood.

Wondering much how Kalin and the Rose were faring, and if he might hold off their pursuers until the sledge was through the wall safely, he slipped along to the narrowest point of the path and ordered back the dogs. Again a flare of fire from the depths showed his position to the enemy, and an ilium bladed spear was his greeting, hissing past his cheek to go clattering down the declivity of the precipice.

Urged by Garlanes, the Sardanians had crept dangerously near. Polaris held his hand no longer. He steadied himself and hurled a spear. The man next behind Garlanes fell to the floor of the ledge and lay twitching horribly in silence. The glittering point of the spear was set fast in his throat. Once more the light gave him opportunity and another stout Sardanian gave up the ghost before his unerring cast.

Then Garlanes waited no longer, for the coming of Minos, but gathered his men and charged.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUMBLING OF MINOS

IT WAS no part of Polaris's program to take part in a hand-to-hand fight with the pursuers. There were seven of them remaining, and with nothing but his own safety at stake, he might have been confident of the issue; but he did not dare, under the circumstances, to take the risk of the encounter.

When he saw that a charge might be delayed no longer, he turned and ran swiftly along the curve of the ledge, the dogs racing with him. He, the fleetest of runners, now went at top speed. When he stopped, some hundred and fifty feet away, Garlanes and his men had barely rounded the bulge of rock to the wider part of the path.

They charged the neck of the way, and, finding the way widen, where there was nothing to take cover behind, they quite naturally hesitated for the next move of their foe.

That move came quickly. Garlanes, in the lead, heard something sing past his ear like an angry bee. The man next behind him felt something strike him over the heart, and he threw up his hands and crumpled to the floor. The walls of the mighty tunnel flung back a crashing echo to the sharp report of the rifle. Kneeling close to the wall, peering through the fitful light, Polaris watched the effect of his shot.

Vainly he hoped that superstition would come to his aid and hold the Sardanians back from the carnage. They were dismayed. By the intermittent flares of garish light from the throat of the volcano, Polaris could see their consternation in their faces and gestures; but he had not stopped them.

After a momentary examination of the body of their comrade, they came on, but slowly.

With loud cries of encouragement, Prince Minos and his men, summoned by the messenger from Garlanes, poured around the corner of the rock, and the entire body came on apace.

Again Polaris took up the retreat, running swiftly, and keeping well out of the range of the spear casting. Presently, when he deemed that he must be nearly half-way around the rim of the crater, he came to another narrower part of the pathway where a large rock lay, behind which he could crouch. There he decided to make his stand, and to retreat no farther until the summons of Kalin should tell him that the sledge was clear of the tunnel.

He refilled the magazine of the rifle, and waiting calmly for the flickering light to make his aim sure, he began methodically to pick off the foremost pursuers, making every bullet count. Under the pitiless accuracy of his fire, the Sardanians lagged uncertainly, but always they crept nearer.

Six times had the brown rifle sent its death unseen, almost unfelt, across the arc of the crater rim, when there was a stir among the dogs behind the marksman, a touch on his shoulder, a voice in his ear.

"Come, brother, all is ready. Haste thee before they close in!" called Kalin.

Not a score of yards farther they came to a passage in the wall, or, rather, a fissure through it, which seemed to have been floored by the hand of man at some distant time. It led at right angles from the crater shelf. As Polaris looked into it he could see that it was lighted dimly by the light of day. It was barely wide enough for the passage of the sledge, and it so twisted in the rock that it had been a slow and difficult task for the priest to drive the ponies through.

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Circumstance willed that they were not to pass the tunnel without further mishap and bloodshed.

Slowly the enemy had crept up. When Kalin and Polaris broke cover and dashed for the mouth of the tunnel, the foremost of the Sardanians was only a short spear throw behind. In the momentary pause at the mouth of the tunnel, men and dogs were bunched, and offered a fair target to the Sardanians leaping along the ledge.

With a scream of pain and rage, the dog Pallas leaped thrice her height from the floor and fell, writhing in her death agonies. A spear had penetrated behind the poor brute's shoulder, nearly piercing the body through.

Her death wail was drowned in the terrible challenge that came from the throats of the pack, and the cry of anger that rose from the lips of her master. Kalin stood alone at the mouth of the narrow way, holding the rifle that had been thrust into his hands. In the midst of his leaping, snarling dogs, Polaris, raging like a demon at the slaughter of his old playmate and servant, threw himself back into the teeth of the charge of Minos's men.

Clutching a heavy spear in his right hand and whirling it like a toy, and with a revolver in his left, he swept down the ledge, thrusting and firing. Around him the six dogs of the pack fought after their own fashion, rending and snapping like devils.

In the face of that attack the Sardanians shrank aghast.

Thirty feet or more back along the pathway Polaris fought blindly for vengeance before his reason returned to him. In front of him the Sardanians were huddled in the path, backing away and obstructed in their flight by those behind who were pushing forward, under the threats and commands of Minos, the Prince.

Polaris's brain cleared. He heard the voice of Kalin calling to him to return. He turned and raced swiftly to the tunnel, over the bodies of the dead. Behind him the rush of pursuit gathered and came on again.

Through the tunnel they raced, dogs and men, and came out into the sunlight, which shone on crags and boulders and bare earth.

"Quickly, now; the rocking stone—tip it over!" gasped the priest.

Where the tunnel ended was its narrowest point. A man might reach out and touch both walls. On the rock above the entrance beetled what Kalin called the "rocking stone." It was an enormous boulder, the fang of some glacial jaw in the primeval, or a fragment spat from the maw of the volcano. Where it had come to rest, at the very verge of the tunnel entrance, it was balanced. So nice was its adjustment on its natural pedestal that the breath of a strong breeze caused it to sway, or rock gently; the hand of a strong man might increase the oscillation greatly.

"Tip it over!" gasped Kalin, pointing with his hand.

A glance told Polaris his purpose. In the passage swelled the clamor of pursuit. He sprang up the rocks, set his powerful shoulder under the belly of the immense stone, and shoved with all his strength.

Over swayed the stone—farther than it had ever swayed before in all the centuries that it had stood there. The solid rock of its foundation grated and crumbled. Over it swung but not far enough to fall. To the straining man, whole minutes seemed to be passing as the stone hung; then, despite his utmost effort, it shuddered—and swung back!

Polaris turned and set his broad back to the surface of the stone as it oscillated. He waited until its recoil swing was completed, and, as it again inclined toward the fissure, he straightened his doubled legs and put forth all the power in his magnificent muscles.

He heard the roaring of the leaping blood in his ears. He heard the uneasy crumbling of the rock at his feet. He shut his eyes and strained grimly—triumphantly! The resistance ceased, and he threw himself on his side to avoid falling. The huge boulder pitched into the tunnel, grinding and crashing ,and settled its weight of tons squarely across the passage.

As it went down, there was a flash of white beneath it, and the body of a tall man shot through the portals that were closing forever, and fell on his face on the slope.

It was Minos the Prince! Outdistancing all his men, he had dashed through the passage, and hurled himself at the daylight not one second too soon to escape being crushed under the fall of the rocking stone. Behind his flying heels it closed down, grimly and solidly, splintering the walls at either side to make way for itself. When it rested on the floor of the crevice it completely filled the entrance. Not a squirrel could have clambered through.

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DULLY through the wall of rock penetrated the dismayed clamor of the Sardanians in the passage, and the muted sound of their spears smiting on the stone. No efforts of theirs could so much as shake the boulder. Nothing short of giant powder would dislodge it.

Desperate at his plight, made mad with fury, or surpassingly daring was Minos the Prince, for he picked himself up with a shout and charged headlong at the men and dogs who confronted him.

"This task to me brother," shouted Polaris to Kalin, who lifted spear to defend himself. Polaris had sprung down from the pedestal of the rocking stone, and he leaped unhesitatingly into the path of Minos.

With lightning swiftness he caught a grip on the haft of the spear which the prince whirled up to pierce him. For a moment the two men stood tense, with upstretched arms, battling fiercely, but without motion, for the mastery of the weapon. Then Polaris widened his grip on the shaft and twisted it sharply from his antagonist's grasp.

They stood breathing deeply, and Polaris cast the spear away, at the same time sternly ordering off the dogs which would have rushed on Minos.

"A trick," said Minos with a smile, glancing at his empty hands. "Another trick, O clever stranger! Now try a fall with Minos, where tricks will not avail." He flung his arms around Polaris.

His grip was of steel. In all Sardanes the "smiling prince" was known as the strongest man. Once, for a wager, he had trussed the legs of a full grown pony, and had carried it on his shoulders unaided, from the river to the Judgement House.

Round about Polaris his long legs tightened, and he tugged upward mightily, in an effort to tear his antagonist from his foothold and hurl him down. He would have plucked an ordinary man from the earth like a toy, but he was not pitted against an ordinary man. He was the strongest man in Sardanes, but Sardanes was small, and her strong men few. Polaris was perhaps the strongest man in the world.

He stood firm. Not only that, but he thrust his hands upwards, gripping the prince in the armpits, and slowly straightened his arms, despite the utmost effort of the struggling prince to pinion them to his sides. Strain as Minos might, he could not break that grip beneath his shoulders.

Slowly, very slowly, Polaris straightened his arms. As he did so, he bent his hands in from the wrists, exerting an ever increasing pressure at each side of Minos's broad chest. To his own intense astonishment, the prince, whom no man ever had mastered, felt his foothold growing insecure, felt his ribs slowly curving in and his breathing growing short and painful, felt his mighty arms slipping.

In vain he straightened up to his towering height and shook his sweep of shoulders. His terrible grip was broken.

Polaris suddenly loosed his hold, passed his arms up within those of the prince, and brought them down with elbows bended, freeing himself entirely. He caught Minos by the wrists, and exerting a strength that almost crushed the bones, he pressed downward swiftly and relentlessly.

The Prince of Sardanes knelt on the bare rock at the feet of the son of the snows.

No word had been spoken. Polaris let fall his enemy's wrists, and pointed along the mountainside toward the pass that led into the valley.

"Yonder lieth thy way, back to Sardanes, prince," he said gently. "Go back to thy people and rule them wisely, O Minos. Seek not to follow us. We go hence on a far journey, and will not be denied or turned. As to the strife that hath arisen, no man can regret it more than I. Farewell."

Minos answered not, and Polaris turned to the girl and the priest. He saw that all was in readiness for their going. Tethered to a tree below them in the mountain's belt of green were the snorting ponies. He threw out his arm in a sweeping gesture. "The way to the north is open," he said. "Let us be going."

CHAPTER XIX

KALIN WINS HIS KNOWLEDGE

FOR fifty miles Polaris and Kalin drove the Sardanian ponies along the Hunters' Road, while the dogs of the pack raced strong and free at the sides of the sledge. Alas, it was now but a five-dog pack! Octavius had given his life in the crater, in the mad fight to avenge the death of Pallas. Two Sardanians had fallen under his gashing jaws when a spear-thrust found his vitals, and in his death-pain he had leaped over

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the rim of the fire-pit to the molten lake in the depths.

Of the pack remained Juno, Hector, Julius, Nero, and Marcus, the giant leader.

Urged on by voice and crack of whip, the ponies tore along the snow-paths, mile after mile. Rose Emer rode on the sledge, and the men beside it with the dogs.

When they had traveled fifty miles or more, the little beasts showed signs of going to pieces, and Polaris halted them. Enough fodder had been taken from the valley to give the animals one good meal. The men fed them and made camp.

After the ponies were somewhat rested from their long pull in the snows, Polaris pointed their noses toward home and whipped them into the trail. Tossing their heads in the air, the little beasts set off along the road in a cloud of fine snow-dust upflung from their scurrying hoofs.

"Yonder goeth the last link with thy land, Kalin," said Polaris, as the men and the maid stood to watch the departure of the small horses.

"Aye," replied the priest and smiled. "Now be *thy* land my land. On to the north," and he pointed ahead with steady hand to where the massive ice barrier stood in their path, its glittering sides gleaming a steely blue in the sunlight. He turned to Rose Emer.

"Lady," he said in the halting English, of which he had acquired a surprising knowledge, considering the few days that had elapsed since he first had heard that tongue —"lady, Kalin—American—now."

"Yes," smiled the girl in answer; "am I not well guarded? Two American gentlemen to watch over me. I could have no better protectors."

Kalin caught the significance of her remark, and smiled his wonderfully sweet, sad smile—the smile that always struck to the heart of Polaris with a prescience of sorrow to come.

Inland they pushed, skirting the base of the towering ice-wall, seeking for some spot where they might pass over or through it. Disaster dogged fast on their heels, waiting to strike.

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On the seventh day out from the valley the first blow fell.

They had passed the ice-ridge. After three days of groping along its base, they came to a place where the mighty wall was deeply notched and the slope was less steep. There, aided by a heavy fall of snow, which partly melted and then froze, giving a scant foothold on the ice-hills, they were able to pass.

ONE entire day was consumed in making passage. At length they passed the wall in safety, and found themselves in an apparently interminable stretch of plain and hummock and crevasse, where the going was slow and laborious and exceedingly perilous.

Then the priest fell ill.

Either the unaccustomed fare—their diet now consisted almost entirely of fish and boiled snow water prepared over the little oil stove—or the rigor of the atmosphere and the exertions caused a sudden decline in the bodily powers of Kalin. Strive as he might, his waning strength became apparent, and he lagged in the journeying through the steppes of snow.

The capstone of trouble came when his eyes unused to the continual glare of the relentless sun on the fields of snow and the cliffs of ice, gave way to the dread snow blindness, the *bête noir* of all explorers in polar regions.

For hours he was able to conceal his blindness from his companions. With stubborn will bent to the task, he ran on with the sledge, guiding himself with his hand at its rail, after the last faint glimmerings of sight had vanished. He had a splendid will, and he made it dominate his weakening body long after it seemed that his muscular strength was unequal to the demand of the trail. It was impossible for them to travel as swiftly as they had, but he would not yield to his creeping weakness, and still ran on.

When the darkness fell he was undismayed and said nothing, hoping against hope that it would pass away. He could no longer keep up his pretense, however, at the first camping spot, and his companions saw him groping helplessly once he had quitted the side of the sledge.

His plight struck a chill to the stout heart of Polaris, who realized that in speed lay their only hope of earthly salvation. Bitter weather lay to the north of the ice barrier, and there was almost no game from which to replenish their stock of food. The days of travel had diminished it to the point where a fresh supply had come to be a problem demanding speedy solution.

Now, to accommodate their pace to that of the tottering blind man, or to carry him, nearly doubling the load of the dogs, spelled almost sure defeat.

He gave no inklings of his foreboding to either Kalin or Rose Emer, but cheered the priest as best he might in his affliction, and pressed on with what speed was possible. Three more laps on the journey they made before the steely fortitude of Kalin gave way, and he could no longer force his exhausted limbs to bear the weight of his failing body. In mid career across the snows, he stumbled from the path and fell prone in lee of a huge drift.

Polaris plucked him from the snow.

"Kalin is outdone!" gasped the Sardanian. "Thou, my brother, and the Lady Rose must go forward and leave me. On to the north, O brother! Kalin dieth!"

"Not so, Kalin," answered Polaris. "My breath will leave my body before I desert my brother. Didst thou falter in Sardanes, when all were against the strangers? And shall Polaris desert thee now?"

"But for the lady's sake, thou must," persisted Kalin. "Thou mayest not fail her, and delay is death."

"She would not buy even her life at such a price, O Kalin," said Polaris. "Together we will fare to the north, or together will we keep eternal watch here in the snows."

Unheedful of the protests of the priest, he carried him to the sledge and rearranged the load on the vehicle, making a place for Kalin at the rear behind the girl. Thus they took up again the tale of the journey, but more slowly than they had yet traveled, the load taxing the powers of the diminishing team-pack.

Once broken in the pride of his endurance, the priest rapidly lost hold on himself, and his vitality seemed to ooze from him with the passing hours. At the second stop after Polaris had made a place for him on the sledge the son of the snows discovered that one of his legs, which seemed to be paralyzed, was frozen from foot to knee; yet Kalin did not seem to know it.

At the close of a particularly trying march —their going no longer could be called a

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dash—Polaris made their camp at the sheltered side of one of the hummocks of rock and ice with which the land was sprinkled, and all of them, dogs and humans, slumbered wearily for many hours.

Polaris awoke with a strange weight at his throat. It was the ilium necklace of Kalin, in which glimmered the red stones He held it up for an instant in wonder at its presence there and then sprang to the priest's sleeping parka.

It was empty Kalin was not in the camp!

CHAPTER XX

HOPE—AND A WILL

WITHOUT arousing the girl, Polaris made hasty search Some rods along the back trail, he saw a break in the snow at the side of the trail There he found the priest lying on his back, with his face turned up to the sun and his keen-pointed dagger piercing his heart. He had stumbled thither as far as his endurance would sustain him More joyful than ever it had seemed in life was the half smile at the lips of the dead man.

That smile was the only message he had left. He had been dead for hours.

Polaris drew the dagger from the dead heart that had loved him well and hurled it afar in the snow He smoothed the dress of the priest and bore the body to the camp Before he aroused the girl he placed the corpse again in the sleeping parka.

Then he called the girl and told her that Kalin was dead, but made no mention of the way the priest had taken.

"Ah, another brave heart stilled—and because of me!" she cried, and the tears came, for she had liked the priest well. As she wept, Polaris told her of the love the man had borne her.

"And, lady," he said, "wherever Kalin is, he is well content, for he has aided you toward your dearest wishes and his soul asked no more than that."

He dug with the blade of a spear at the foot of one of the icy monoliths, and laid the corpse of Kalin there, while the dogs, which always seemed to sense the presence of death, bayed a hoarse requiem above the grave. But neither then nor at any future time did Polaris tell the girl of the supreme sacrifice Kalin made at the last, not wishing to make her suffer more regret.

On the rude grave he had made he piled a few loose fragments of rock, and turned to the task of breaking camp for the next northward lap into the wild land.

TWO hundred miles to the north and east, three men were gathered on the snow-crust in a little valley, wrenching and thrumming at the wires and pinions of the first bird-machine that ever had penetrated into the fastnesses of the antarctic.

All was taut for the start. The wings were set The engines responded to the power. The propeller thrilled the air. Into the seat climbed a lean, fur-clad young man, with a thin face, high cheek-bones shadowing deep-set, cold, blue eyes, and a wisp of drab moustache above thin, eager lips.

'Ready there, Aronson," he said, to a man standing by.

A second later Captain James Scoland sailed majestically away into the white mystery of the unknown polar land

At the door of the snow house that had been their home for days, Aronson and Mikel, who had pressed with him to his farthest south camp, watched his going with shaded eyes. A tiny silken flag bearing the stars and stripes, fluttered from one of the canvas plane wings. Mikel watched it as far as it was distinguishable.

'An' here's hopin' he carries Old Glory safely through to the pole—an' back again!" he shouted.

Leagues farther to the north, in another tiny camp, three other men were waiting, also. Still farther on, in an ice-locked harbor, the good ship Felix rode day by day, the little company of its crew watching the slow passing of the hours, with every ear attuned to catch the first voice returning from the south that should tell of success, or of defeat and death.

And were that tale of success, those on the ship nursed a heavy sorrow, that would turn into bitterness all the glory of success. A glorious maid and two men who had been of their company had strayed from the ship and perished in the wilderness.

SILENCE.

As far as the eye could reach, a dull wilderness, stretching wearily under a leaden, sunless sky. A rolling plain of lusterless snow, cut sharply here and there by crevasses, gashed at intervals by rifts of unknown depths and tortuous gulleys. North

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and south seemingly without bounds; east and west, many a mile of bleak fatigue between low, sullen hills of gray.

A land without sound, without life, and without hope.

Yet, among the ridges in that dead and twilight chaos, something stirred. A dark speck crawled on and on, writhing along the brinks of the crevasses, skirting the yawning rifts, twisting in and out around the hummocks, like the course of some wriggling vermin across the cracked and gaping skin of a white, unholy corpse.

Northward, ever northward, the b l o t dragged its crooked way. Nearer would it resolve itself into two wearily plodding beasts, tugging, slipping, stumbling, but going on, the creaking straps of their leathern harness pulling a sledge with a heap of skins upon it. Still nearer—a fur-clad, haggard man with hollow, blazing eyes glittering through an unkempt shock of golden hair and a gaunt gray dog with drooping tail picking their way with s o u n d l e s s feet through the white reaches, dragging their sledge; like a fantasy passing across the white and silent dream of the cold end of the world.

Once the dog had looked up into the face of the master, the dumb eloquence of sacrifice shining through its eyes, an age-old fire. The massive jaws slipped apart, but closed again; only a sigh was breathed from the beasts's broad chest.

"Aye, Marcus, I know," muttered the man. "I know that you'll die on your four feet, if you can, and in the straps. And I, Marcus," his voice dropped to a whisper, "I'll die, too, Marcus, as you will—for the Rose—all for the Rose— But not yet, Marcus; for the Rose yet lives, and death is slow for the very strong."

Five luckless days had passed since the priest had laid his burdens by. One by one the cruel south had taken lives in toll, until only Polaris and the grim pack leader stood in harness to race with death on the course to the north.

First polar bears, made mad by hunger, attacked the party, and two of the dogs, Juno and Nero, died under the sweeping crescent claws.

A nameless distemper, from which no dog, however carefully bred, is quite immune, had seized both Hector and Julius. For hours they acted strangely as they ran, and then, at a stopping place, they went quite mad and turned on the man and girl.

Hector went down to silence under the crushing jaws of Marcus, who rose with a mighty roar to quell this insane mutiny; and Julius died on the spear of Polaris. There were tears on the cheek of the man as he drove the weapon home.

Refashioning the harness to suit his own wide shoulders, Polaris then took up the work of the lost dogs. For two long days of many marches he and Marcus had dragged the sledge. Now, with their stock of provisions dwindled away and their rations slender, the terrific strain of the journey was telling almost to madness on the man and the dog.

They came to rest in the shelter of one of the thousands of hummocks, and Polaris realized, with a chill at his stout heart, that their march had advanced them a bare score of miles from their last stopping place, when they should have covered at least twice that distance.

From her nestling place beneath the heap of furs on the sledge he gently aroused Rose Emer. The girl rode most of the weary miles in light and fitful slumbers, drowsy with the cold, and her brain at times benumbed by the prospect, now nearer and nearer, of almost certain disaster—a contingency which the man would not admit.

She came forth listlessly, and they prepared their poor meal over the flame of the little oil-burner, and ate it within the shelter of the skins which the man stretched to confine the heat from the stove. They divided their rations with Marcus, and girl and man and dog huddled at the side of the sledge, to sleep if they might until the time for the next setting forth along the terrible way.

SOME hours later, when Polaris awakened her, ready for the next march forward, she shook her head wearily.

"No, my dear friend, you will have to go on without me. No," as he opened his mouth in quick question, "listen to me. I have thought it all out. If we continue on in this way we can proceed but a few miserable miles at the best, and then perish in the snow. I am the handicap. Without me, you and the dog could leave the sledge and go on alone, and, perhaps, save yourselves. You were born and have lived in this land, and you could get through alone; where, with me to look after, you will not succeed."

Polaris listened in silence, and a smile

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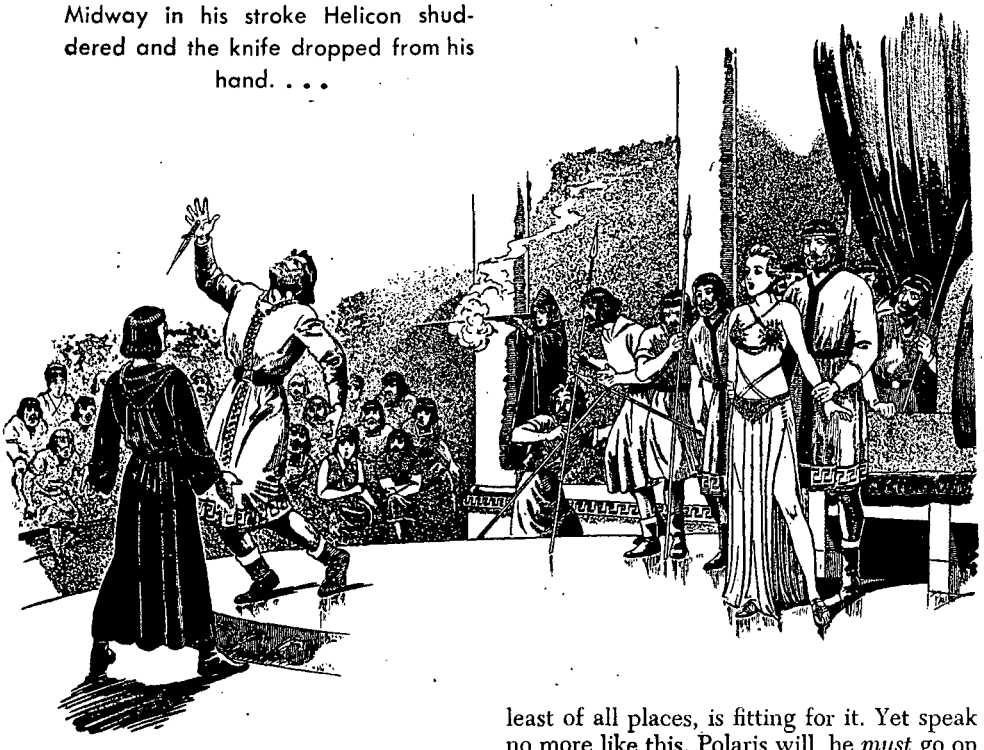
Midway in his stroke Helicon shuddered and the knife dropped from his hand. . . .



gathered at the corners of his mouth, as sad and wistful as any of Kalin's.

"Too much has been done and suffered already on my account," the girl went on. "I cannot let you make this sacrifice. You are as brave and true a gentleman as lives in the world today. All that human being can do, you have done for me. You must not die for me. You must go on and leave me—"

Her voice broke, and she hid her face in her hands. She felt the touch of Polaris's hand on her shoulder.

"Lady," he began, and his strong voice quivered. "Lady, what has Polaris done that you judge him so"

"Ah, no, no!" she sobbed, "you have been good and brave and true, even to the end—but the end is here. Oh, you *must* go on—"

For a moment the man stood and gazed down on her, as she sat with her head bent low: He started to hold out his arms toward her, then clenched his hands at his sides. Immediately he relaxed them, stooped, and swung her lightly from her seat on the furs, and tucked her tenderly in her place on the sledge.

"Dear lady," he said softly, "never did Polaris think to quarrel with you, and here, least of all places, is fitting for it. Yet speak no more like this. Polaris will, he *must* go on as he has gone. If he dies, it will be the death of an American gentleman, not that of a savage and a coward. Come, Marcus!"

He slipped his shoulders into the harness with the dog, and again they went forward into the gray unknown. Through tears the girl watched the strong back bending to its task ahead of her. In her eyes a great light kindled and burned steadily. Not all the antarctic snows might quench it.

They traversed four more laps across the snows, and were starting on their fifth when the final calamity fell.

As usual, they had camped close against the side of one of the larger mounds or hummocks. It was of rock, coated heavily with ice and frozen snow. On its beetling side, just above their little camp, a mass of rock had cracked away from the main body of the hummock. Its slow separation had been a matter of years, perhaps ages. That fracture might have been begun by the grinding fangs of a glacier five thousand years ago, and completed by the tireless and eternal frosts.

There it was poised, masked by the snow and ice, waiting its time to fall.

At the moment that the travelers turned their faces from camp, and Polaris started to

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assist Rose Emer to her seat on the sledge, the hour struck for the fall. Rock grated on rock above them, warning the man to spring back. He dragged the girl aside. A few pieces of ice rattled down. Then the fragment, a weight of tons, toppled squarely down upon the rear of the sledge, crushing it to splinters, and burying it in the loose snow.

They stared at the wreck, and Marcus growled and strained to free himself from the harness.

Polaris dug aside the covering snow. A moment's inspection showed that the sledge was nothing but shattered uselessness. Indeed, could he have repaired it, he had not the chance. It was beneath the mass of the fallen rock, too great a weight for even his powers to remove. Some of their vanishing store of provisions also lay under the rock.

"We still can walk, lady," Polaris said. "We will go on together."

"No, dear friend, we will not walk on," she replied. "See, my foot is hurt, and I can scarcely stand upon it. A splinter of ice struck it when the rock fell—"

Polaris leaped to her side and examined the extended ankle. He found it not broken, but bruised and swelling rapidly. It was true that she could not walk on it, nor would for many days.

HE MADE no answer to her last argument. He tore several skins robes from the fore part of the sledge, and set her down on them. Then, as well as he could, he bandaged the bruised ankle, winding it with strips of hide, outside the girl's boot, for he dared not remove the coverings from the injured limb lest the cold do it irreparable injury.

His hasty surgery completed, he stepped to the ruin of the sledge and filled two skin sacks with the remains of the meat which he could come at. He strapped one of them on the back of Marcus, and the other he slung on his own shoulders.

With his knife he cut and fashioned at one of the skin robes. When he approached the girl again he wore a rude sling, which he had passed about his neck and shoulders, so that it hung across his broad chest.

He plucked her from the snow, wrapped her in a robe, and set her in the sling at his breast. He stooped, and with his knife cut Marcus out of the useless harness.

Unbelievable as it was that human beings so beset could continue to exist, they proceeded thus for the space of two days. At the end of each short march they huddled together in their robes—the girl and the dog and the man, and warmed with the heat of their bodies their frozen food, until they might chew and mumble it. Still closer they huddled for their fitful slumbers.

On the march the girl swooned many times with the throbbing pain of her swollen ankle. Always she awoke to find herself in the man's arms. They wound about her, a living barrier, which death itself could not pass. All the weary miles of the weary marches he carried her.

Under her weight, every muscle of his splendid body was racked with the pangs of torture, until the fierce pain was succeeded by a numbness that slowly enveloped his body and crept up to his brain. He felt that he had been transformed into a marching machine of unfeeling steel. He went on, bearing his burden, mile after mile, stolidly, doggedly, splendidly.

Two days passed. Polaris roused himself from where they slept huddled in a little hollow in the snow.

The mere rising to his feet was a matter of minutes, and he swayed uncertainly. Once more he fought fiercely with the temptation to acknowledge that this, indeed, was the end, and to follow the footsteps of Kalin. Once more his courage upheld his resolve. He would go on. He would walk until he could walk no longer. Then he would crawl on his hands and knees, drag himself forward with his hands, but he would go on.

As he stooped there came to his ears a humming, faint and far away. He arranged the robe and gathered Rose Emer gently into the ling. With immense effort he straightened his knees and back and stood erect again. Again the humming noise, nearer now, and louder! Marcus floundered out of the hollow, both ears pricked, and growled a weak, hoarse defiance. Polaris followed.

From a distant humming the noise rose to a shrilling; from a shrilling to a prolonged shriek. The man came out of the hollow, and his eyes sought the sky, whence came the sound. His heart bounded and threatened to burst in his breast.

SHARPLY outlined against the dazzling sky, sailing along on steady planes like a great white bird of the air, her engine pur-

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ring and thrilling, and her propeller screaming, an air-ship passed athwart his vision!

Enthralled, his eyes, followed it. It was less than half a mile away to his right. He tried to shout aloud, but his voice was feeble, and seemed to be thrown back at him from the air. Before he could rouse the girl, or convey to her senses what was occurring, the ship of the air had vanished. It dipped out of sight into the mouth of a little valley.

He looked again. No, his eyes did not deceive. Smoke was curling up from the valley, a thin blue spiral. The bird man had alighted there. There was a camp of men. Food and warmth, rescue and life for his precious burden—all were there in that little valley, a bare quarter of a mile away across the snow. Could he ever reach it?

Into his brain leaped a multitude of quick thoughts. Joy and the shadow of an old suspicion came together. He knelt again in the snow and aroused Rose Emer.

"Lady," he said very softly, "you are saved. Yonder," and he pointed across the snow toward the valley—"yonder is the smoke of a camp, and an air-ship from the south just landed in that valley."

Rose Emer strained her eyes across the snow. She saw the smoke and comprehended. For an instant she bowed her face on her arms. When she raised it her eyes were streaming. Out of hard despair tear time had come again. She caught his hand to her breast, and then raised it to her lips. He snatched it from her.

"Oh, but I thank you; words are too feeble to say it. I thank you for life, Polaris!"

"Lady," he made answer, "I am going to make a strange request of you. Yonder are those of your own people—the American captain and his men. It is my wish that when we come among them you will say nothing of my origin, of where you found me, or what has befallen us, more than is necessary to tell—"

"It is enough that you ask it," the girl broke in. "Never mind any further reason. I will do as you say."

He groped within the breast of his furred waistcoat and took out a small, flat packet, sewn in membranous parchment. "One more favor of your kindness, lady," he asked. "Please keep this packet until I ask it of you again. It is the message which I carry to the world at the north. Should I pass into the world of shadows, you will do me a great service if you will open it and send its contents to whom it is directed."

Rose Emer took the packet and hid it in her bosom.

"Now we will go on to the valley, before strength fails entirely," he said. He straightened up again, and bent to the toil of the pathway which he had marked out for himself. The girl leaned back against his straining breast. Once more, when she might have spoken, she kept silence.

They went on. Slowly, uncertainly, for Polaris staggered much, foot by foot, he fought his way across that bleak and endless quarter of a mile of snow.

Three hours after the air-ship had landed from its history-making dash in and out of the jaws of the antarctic, Captain Scoland and his two men were startled in their camp by an apparition.

Down the slope of the valley and through a circle of snarling dogs that rushed to attack and then slunk back affrighted, strode a grim-faced and silent man. On he came like a machine, or like one who walks wide-eyed at night. Behind him crept the tottering skeleton of a great gray wolf dog.

Slung across the breast of the man was a fur-wrapped bundle. With measured tread he walked on to the door of the shelter, paused, and with no word let his burden gently down into the snow. A corner of the robe fell aside and disclosed the face of Rose Emer. She had swooned, and lay like one dead.

Captain Scoland sprang forward with a strained cry of surprise and question. The strange man stood for an instant, his unseeing eyes fixed on the snow reaches beyond the valley. Then he tossed his arms above his head and pitched backward, inert and lifeless. The tottering wreck of a dog crept up and licked his face.

CHAPTER XXI

AMERICA!

"THEY say the wild man is going to live," said a voice.

"Yes, Doc Clawson says he'll pull through all right," said another. "He's had a close call, if ever a man had. I wonder who and what he is."

"So do I," rejoined the first voice. "Do you believe that, that he is a wild man?"

"Dunno. What you goin' to believe?" The

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first voice became confidential. "I heard Doc tell the mate that he hadn't spoke an English word in all his sick ravings, except 'Lady,' which he might have learned from the girl. Then there's the knife. Captain's got that. It ain't like no metal any one ever saw. There's letters on it Doc says are Greek, but nobody here can read 'em. Doc says he believes what the chap jabbers in Greek too."

"He's got a queer necklace, too," chimed in the second voice. "It's made of the same kind of stuff as the knife is, and strung with red pebbles. Wonder what they'll do with him?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't you let your wonderin' run away with you. Cap's actin' queerer and queerer. Did you notice him when he came aft this mornin'—after the talk he had with the doc? I tell you somethin's gone wrong, all right—"

Scuffling footsteps broke the tenor of the voices, and they faded away to a murmur, and then to silence.

Those scraps of a conversation drifted to the mind of Polaris, where for hours and hours a tiny spark of comprehension had been struggling back into being. They were the first words that his returning consciousness had understood.

He opened his eyes.

Surely that knot in the oaken beam above him was an old friend, the one shaped so like the head of a horse. And that row of iron bolt-heads; how often he had counted them over! He lay in a white-covered berth in a small cabin, in which every seam and stitch and object was strangely familiar, but which his reawakening consciousness refused to recognize. Sunlight was streaming in through a partly opened port, and with it came the sound of the sea.

Slowly, for he found it required considerable effort, he turned over on his side and looked about him. Where was he? Above all, how had he got there? As he moved he felt something at his neck slip, and through the open throat of the linen garment he wore fell the heavy loop of the necklace of Kalin.

Wondering, he stared at the iridescent links of ilium and the dull red stones. Then the spring that held the tight-wound coil of memory snapped, and the past unrolled like an endless ribbon.

He was weak. He had been ill. Yes, now he held the key—that conversation he had just heard. The "wild man" of whom the sailors talked was himself. He smiled. Already his yellow beard had grown long and ragged, and covered his throat. The knife, and the necklace—all of the talk had referred to him.

And they said that in all his delirium he had spoken no word of English! He smiled to himself once more. So even when his conscious self had departed from control of his body and mind, he had held fast to his fanciful resolution. Rose Emer must also have kept her promise. Not a soul but herself guessed who he was.

But that last part of the sailors' talk? What did that mean? What *were* they going to do with him?

In an instant he was alert and bitterly suspicious. He was on a ship, a ship at sea. He was in the power of the American captain, the man who had sought and probably found the great and mystic pole; also the man who was the affianced husband of the girl whom Polaris had carried across the snow deserts in his arms. Now he had a duty laid upon him, which he secretly guessed would conflict sorely with the wishes of the captain. While he lived, he would strive to carry out that duty.

BUT why had he lived? At the end of his terrible journey darkness had fallen upon him in the camp; why had it ever lifted? If it had not, he had been freed of his promise, and would have been content.

What had happened since then? Where was Rose Emer? The gossip of the sailors had included no news of her; but so the inference was that all was well with her. Where was Marcus? How long had he been ill?

These questions remained unanswered. He could not know that he had lain heavy and inert on a sledge for days, with only the thickness of their fur parkas separating him from Rose Emer, while Scoland's men, abandoning all that did not make for speed, had driven dogs to death in their wild dash back to the Felix.

He could not know that he had been given up for dead by the men, and that, even then, that conclusion brought little of regret to the heart of the American commander. Nor could he know that Rose Emer would not have it so, and that, under her entreaties, the supposed corpse had been carried on to the ship, and to the good medical man on it, who found that some-

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where in the fastnesses of the silent form stretched before him a tiny flicker of life still abode, and would respond to care.

That care he had received, and in good measure. To Dr. Clawson he most certainly owed his life—twice over. Having saved it once, the integrity of the physician withstood the hint, almost brutally direct, from Scoland, that the man would be better off if he were let to die quietly.

Polaris was the one fly in the ointment of the daring captain of the Felix. His vague suspicions concerning the origin of the stranger and his business in the snow land had become an obsession. From the girl he could obtain no satisfaction, and only food for more suspicion. She would say little of her rescue, and less of her rescuer, taking refuge from anything like investigation in the declaration that the stirring of the memory of those days in the wilderness was too much for her already overwrought nervous system.

Scoland was a man greatly daring; he also was a man who would scruple little to remove, by any means that seemed safe to himself, any obstacle which stood between him and that which he desired. He had striven for a great prize and won. Another prize lay almost within his grasp. Should an obstacle to either intervene, he would do his utmost to sweep it aside.

Was this strange wanderer an obstacle? Could he be one of a party who had penetrated the fastnesses of the snows, to wrest from jaws of berg and glacier the secret of the pole?

Captain Scoland had heard of no such party. When he thought of how the man came, proofless, he smiled at his own suspicions. And yet—might not others have waited for the return of this man, as the crew of the Felix had waited for himself?

Then there was the strange demeanor of the girl, her reticence and her almost rapt interest in the man. Even now she might have been haunting the sick man's cabin, but that Scoland had persuaded her that his mind was gone, and that he was well enough off as far as the needs of the body were concerned.

To do the captain justice, the attitude of the girl, her interest in the strange man, were the minor considerations. Everything must step aside for his glory as the discoverer of the pole. Already the press of two hemispheres was heralding his successful return, and the savants of the nations were awaiting his proofs. There must be no cloud on his title, no question of his right. He would make that sure.

An unsuspected cunning in dealings with other men had been awakened in the breast of Polaris. Suddenly awake to the full consciousness of his mental powers, he was swayed by his suspicion, by the warnings his father had given him long ago, his oft-repeated advice as to the intentions and possible actions of the first white men he was apt to meet.

He was awake from delirium, and his head was clear. To all appearances his mind still wandered. A little observation taught him when a sailor brought him food from the cook's galley, and when to expect the visits of the doctor. They soon found him changed in one respect. He accepted food, and once or twice they surprised him floundering weakly about the little cabin. But he showed them no brightness of mind. His glances were vacant, his manners those of an imbecile almost.

He bided his time.

His strength came back to him slowly, although he concealed that fact. They were far up the coast, not two weeks journey from New York, when he first came to a realization of being, after his long siege of brain fever and weakness. In those two weeks he took every measure to prepare himself against their landing on American soil.

He knew not at all what he should face, but he wished to be ready for it with all his old-time strength and agility. Not entirely could he disassociate his mind from the idea that opposition and trouble must be answered with the strength of one's body.

The man who brought the food and the physician who tended him came only in the day time. Therefore Polaris spent most of his days supinely in his berth. At night he was supremely active. Up and down the narrow confines he paced. He leaped lightly. He stretched and strained each limb and muscle.

Hour after hour he endured the severest "calisthenics"—not those taught in the gymnasium, but anything and everything in the line of the motion to which his surroundings lent themselves.

AT LENGTH the Felix day in Quarantine. The next day they would dock. Scoland would meet and accept the homage of a na-

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tion which had gone temporarily wild over his exploits. Before that landing he would dispose of the living problem which lay and gibbered in the berth in the cabin that had been Burleson's.

Privately Scoland made arrangements with the authorities at a big institution for the care of the insane up the river. They were to send for the man. The captain explained that the patient was a member of his crew who had lost the balance of his mind due to the hardships he had endured.

That night Polaris checkmated all the captain's carefully made preparations. Tense with excitement, the son of the snows had realized that they lay near the land. Then he had seen it from the port. Snatches of talk of the sailors told him that it was New York at last—the city of his dreams. One scrap of conversation focused all his long-nursed doubts.

They had sailed to Quarantine through an almost continual blare of every kind of noise-making instrument on the decks of every ship they passed or met. With his head at the port Polaris caught, in a sudden interval of quiet, a few words from the deck above him. He recognized the voice of Captain Scoland, talking to the mate.

"They'll come for him in a launch at Quarantine," he said. "It's all arranged. Here's the cabin key. Better take a couple of the boys to help the keepers. He might try to make trouble."

That was all—*and enough!*

Soon after his return to consciousness Polaris had learned that the door to the cabin where he lay was kept locked always. It had been one of his earliest causes for suspicion. Some time after midnight that night he set his powerful shoulder to that door, and pressed his weight against it. Minutes he stood there, gradually increasing the pressure, until the lock sprung in its wards with a slight snap, and the knob yielded in his twisting fingers.

The man who had brought the food had left in the cabin a few rough garments such as the sailors wore. Polaris had donned them as he occasionally left the berth in the day time. He wore them now. Had any one met him, he scarcely would have been recognized as the "madman." He had found a razor in Burleson's cabin, and had shift to shave himself cleanly. He had hacked off the most of his long hair with the same instrument, and had disposed of the evidences of his tonsorial efforts by throwing all through the port into the harbor. Around his neck he wore the necklace of Kalin.

Only a half-defined notion of what he was about to do was in his mind, but there was no fear.

He stole along the silent corridor, and gained the deck and the rail, without being observed by the lone sailor on watch near the wheel-house. Ready to his hand, it seemed, were a short length of plank and a trailing rope, attached firmly to some part of the ship, but long enough and loose enough to serve him.

With the plank under one arm he clambered over the rail and let himself down with the rope. He could not swim a stroke, but he reached the water, and with one arm over the stout bit of plank, he struck out fearlessly for the glittering skyline of the great city that lay ahead.

CHAPTER XXII

THIRTY DAYS

BEFORE many hours Scoland raged quietly when he found that his "wild man" had flown from the cage. But he was tongue-tied. He set cautious inquiry on foot to ascertain what had become of the refugee. He could do no more without publicity, which he did not court. His agents were able to tell him no more than did the broken door of Burleson's cabin on the Felix. Polaris was traceless.

Worried intensely at the first by the disappearance and still apprehensive of a blow at his fortunes from the hand of the snow wanderer, as days went by and nothing was heard from the missing one Scoland breathed more freely. Doubtless the man had gone overboard and drowned; or, if he had reached shore, he had wandered on his ways and would not be heard from again.

Concealing the anxiety she felt, Rose Emer also secretly endeavored to trace the lost Polaris. She met with no better success than had Scoland. Her great-hearted protector was gone.

Rumor had coupled her name with that of the hero of the hour, the discoverer of the pole,* and with the foreecho of wedding

* The South Pole was actually discovered by Roald Amundsen in 1911, a fact which the editors feel it is necessary to mention in deference to the great explorer. The discrepancy need not detract from the value of the great fantasy of the snow-country.

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bells. Several times the subject was mentioned to her by the captain himself. He found the girl strangely silent on the matter that, before their trip to the south he had considered was almost settled. She did not speed his wooing, and he was too busy a man for the time to try and regain his lost advantage.

Dinners, receptions, fetes, and the lecture platform made continual demands on him, and then the summons came to go to Washington and lay the proofs of his polar discovery before the savants of the National Geographic Society.

Nearly a month had worn away since the Felix docked when Scoland journeyed to the Capital to place in the hands of the gray and critical members of the society the data of his explorations, that should fix him for all time in the firmament of famous discoverers—first man to stand at the southern pole.

MORE than two hours after he left the side of the Felix, Polaris propelled his little craft into an angle at the side of a long, low building that lay close to the harbor shore. He reached up, and his fingers hooked over a stone edge. Softly he drew himself up and over. He stood for the first time on the soil of his fathers' country.

With many a close escape from the wheels of ferries and the noses of propellers of other craft, of which a bewildering number were moving, even at that hour, but without being seen of any man, he had made the passage of the harbor. It was no mean accomplishment of itself. He was both weary and hungry after the toil. The second need must wait for a while. He saw near him the shrubbery of a little park. He crawled into the bushes and fell asleep.

Some three hours later, the dawn light shone revealingly on the soles of his bare feet, thrust from under the bush. They caught the eye of a policeman who was good-naturedly clearing the park of its "boarders." He investigated. The appearance of the man who owned the feet was so different from that of the ordinary "vag" habitués of the park, that the bluecoat decided he must "run him in."

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Still sleepy and only half understanding, Polaris went meekly with the policeman. He knew that he was in the hands of a representative of the law of America, a law that his father had taught him must be reverenced and obeyed in all its manifestations.

With every instant unfolding to him a new wonder—from the startling height of a many-storied skyscraper to a belated messenger boy puffing at a cigarette—he was haled to a nearby station-house.

Because he could not, or would not, explain how he came to be in the park, and because his intense interest in the proceedings about him tended to make his answers casual, the judge dismissed him with a curt. "Ten or thirty." The son of the snows went to jail and knew no help for it.

He grew restive with the passing of the days in confinement. He had left but one object in life, and that was the delivery of his father's message. He had guessed for a long time that it had to do with a quest similar to that of Scoland. Now the name of the captain was on every lip. He had gone to Washington, to receive the official recognition of his discovery.

In Washington, Polaris would also liked to have been. And his message? He had given it into the keeping of Rose Emer. Where was she? Would she keep faith?

Then it struck him with the suddenness of a blow that his message might, even now, be in the keeping of the captain, the man who was to be her husband. When he was on the verge of delirium, he had put his most sacred trust into the hands of his enemy!

He laughed at the irony of it. Still, he would go to Washington. The rest was on the knees of the gods. She would keep faith. he knew, but did it rest with her?

Polaris learned much in those thirty days, for there is excellent wisdom even in the bowels of a jail. Came at last the day of his release, and found him in the middle of a puzzle. Not in all America was there a person to whom he could turn in his extremity. He was friendless and penniless. Under the circumstances, he could not bring himself to ask aid of Rose Emer, even if he knew where she was to be found.

Then it was that his dead friend Kalin raised up friends for him, friends and the power to carry out his project.

On the day of his release he was directed to the window of the property clerk's cage in the office of the prison. He found a small, dark-browned man talking with the clerk at the window, who eyed him curiously through thick, tortoise-rimmed spectacles of exaggerated size, that were perched on his high, curved nose.

"My necklace?" said Polaris, as he stood at the window of the cage.

For a moment the clerk hesitated, and he and the little man stared at Polaris. Up and down the little man's eyes roved, and finally a friendly gleam came into them.

"I have come down here to see you about that necklace," he said. "Mr. Atkins, here, he has seen nothing like that necklace of yours. So he has shown it to a friend of his who is one of my employees, and that friend has told to me so much about it that I have come all the way here once just to see it. and then again to see you."

He paused and looked steadily at Polaris, who returned the gaze with interest. What could the man want? Ah, he had it! Money! He would give money for the necklace of Kalin; and money in this land would do anything. It would take him to Washington. He could go as other men went. His face brightened.

"YOUR necklace," pursued the little man, "would you consider selling some of the stones? They are fine rubies, my friend, as no doubt you know. Now tell me, and I read it in your eyes that you cannot lie, are the stones yours? Would there be any legal question as to their ownership?"

"The necklace is mine," said Polaris gravely. "It was the gift of a friend of mine who died, in a foreign land. Do you wish to buy it? I will sell—"

The little man smiled and answered quickly:

"No, not even I wish to purchase the entire necklace. I should have to float a loan to pay its value. But I would like to purchase three or four of the stones."

The end of it was that Polaris parted with three of the smaller stones of the necklace at a price of seventeen thousand dollars—and glad enough the jeweler was to get them at that figure. By a miracle Polaris had fallen into the hands of a man who could help him. He was one of the most noted experts in gems in the metropolis—and honest. Where another might have robbed him easily, this man gave him good value for the stones.

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So it was that while the members of the geographic society were poring over the notes and records of Scoland, and plying the captain with many an admiring question, a young man broke in upon the deliberations.

"Never mind the name," he said to the clerk in the anteroom. "I came from the south with the Captain Scoland. They will wish to hear me."

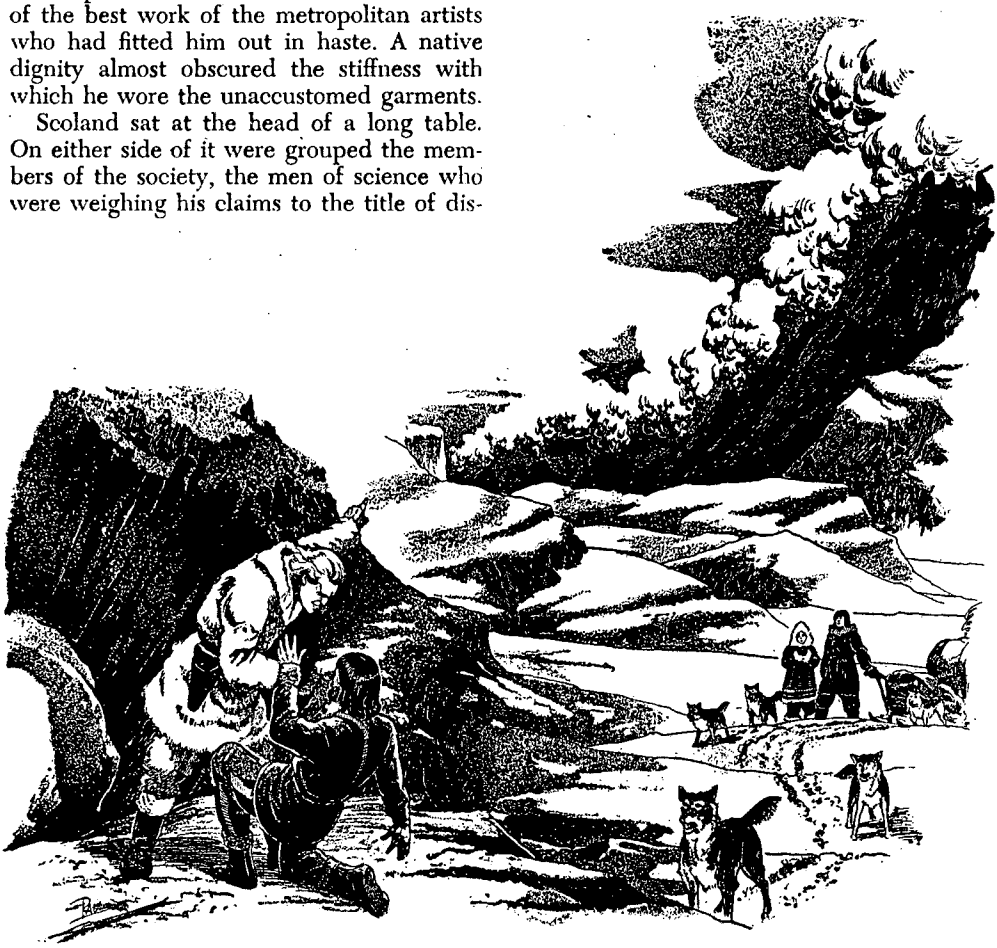
That sufficed, and he entered the council room of the society. He was an exceedingly personable young man, he who thus strode into the den of the savants. He stood a good six feet from his soles, but he was so generously constructed as to shoulders and chest that he did not seem tall.

June had come, and he wore a handsome light textured suit. From the top of his flaxen poll to his shoes, he bore evidences of the best work of the metropolitan artists who had fitted him out in haste. A native dignity almost obscured the stiffness with which he wore the unaccustomed garments.

Scoland sat at the head of a long table. On either side of it were grouped the members of the society, the men of science who were weighing his claims to the title of discoverer of the south pole. As the young man entered the room the captain looked up quickly.

Their eyes met. For an instant the brow of the captain was wrinkled, as though he strove to recall a half-forgotten face. Then the interest in the eyes faded, and he turned them back toward the table. The metamorphosis was too complete for his recognition.

Testy old President Dean turned his leaping blue eyes on the stranger. At the foot of the table a little bowed old man with a puckered face and snapping bright black eyes leaned forward in sudden excitement and gripped the edge of the table until his gaunt knuckles whitened.



Prince Minos of Sardanes knelt humbly before Polaris. "Go back to your people," Polaris told him, "and seek not to follow us"

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"Well, young man, who are you, and what do you want here?" rapped out the president.

"My name is Polaris, which, so far as I know, is all of it," replied the young man, and instantly the odd name he gave himself and the quaintness of his speech had drawn him the interest of every man at the table.

"That which I want here, it may be more difficult for me to tell you," he continued. "I came here from the far south in the ship of that man"—he pointed to Scoland—"bringing a message to the world from a man now dead, the man whom I believe first stood at the place of the southern pole. He—"

Polaris got no further. Scoland sprang to his feet in white rage.

"What's this?" he shouted. "Some crazy man has wandered in here. I never laid eyes on him before. Have him put out!"

FOR an instant there was silence in the room. At the foot of the table old Zenas Wright, who had put some marks on the maps in his own day, stared and stared.

"Steve, Steve, I thought you had come back to me," he murmured. "But you were a larger man, Steve, and that was years ago—years ago."

"Yes, you have laid eyes on me before," said Polaris, addressing Scoland. "A sick man came to your camp through the snows, bringing a member of your party who was lost. You took him to the ship, and your Dr. Clawson nursed him. You brought him to America. You thought him crazy and—But that matters not. I am that sick man, the man who disappeared. Any of your men will remember, or Dr. Clawson."

Scoland sank back into his chair with a troubled face. President Dean turned to him and said rather acidly: "You told us nothing of the finding of a strange man in the polar regions. Is the story of this man true?"

Quickly the captain thought. It was true what this man said. Any member of his crew would remember the "wild man." It would profit him not at all to lie.

"Why, yes," he assented. "There was such a man. But he could not, or pretended that he could not, speak English. He appeared to be a savage and an imbecile to boot. We brought him back with us. He disappeared the night we reached quarantine. Now that I look at this man, it seems that he may be the same, although he is changed greatly. He is undoubtedly crazy."

Scoland spoke confidently. Still, he felt in his heart a return of the forebodings that had warned him against this man since first he had set eyes upon him.

"Who are you, lad, and how did you come to be in the south?" old Zenas Wright spoke up from the foot of the table. His tone was kindly, and there was no suspicion, only deep interest, in the keen eyes he turned on the youth.

"As best I may, I will answer those questions," said Polaris. "I was born in the white south. My mother I never saw—only a grave with the name Anne above it. My father sleeps beside that grave, and above him is the name Stephen."

Zenas Wright started visibly and seemed about to interrupt the tale, but did not, and Polaris continued:

"Other names than those I know not that they had. My father reared me, and I never saw another human being until I met those of the party of Captain Scoland. My father died. He gave me a message to bring to the north—a message addressed to the National Geographic Society of the United States. In that message, he told me, was the story of a great discovery he had made—that would ring around the world—and in it also was the history of myself, which he never told me. We lived far to the south for many years, for my father hurt himself in a fall and could not travel.

"When he died and I came north, I passed and burned the ship in which he went to the south. Its name was the Yedda.

"This man has reached the pole. I do not wish to make his glory dim, but—he is not the first to stand at the pole. I have come here—"

He hesitated and glanced around the circuit of the big table. Every man there was leaning forward in strained attention.

"The message—the message your father sent?" queried President Dean, and held out a shaking hand. "Give us that message."

"I have lost that message," said Polaris quietly.

Scoland burst into a peal of derisive laughter. "A joke, gentlemen—a joke!" he cried. "I don't know who and what this young man is, but he has a rare sense of humor."

"Young man," continued the president severely, "this is a strange tale you have told—an almost unbelievable tale. Yet this society has listened to many strange tales. All that is lacking to make history of the strangest of tales is proof. You say you have

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lost your message. Without proof, no claim can stand before this society. I advise you most strongly to find that message, if such a message you have, and bring it before us. Until you do, the society cannot listen to you further."

He inclined his head and beckoned to the clerk at the door to show Polaris from the room. Polaris heistated. There apparently was nothing more to be said. Still he hesitated. Then he heard two sounds behind him that caused him to turn like lightning. They were a quick little gasp and an astounded whine.

Framed in the doorway stood a girl and a great gray dog!

CHAPTER XXIII

A MESSAGE AND THE END

"ROSE EMER!"

With his whole heart in those two spoken words, Polaris made as if he would spring forward. But masking the heart is the mind, and the mind of Polaris held him still. So he stood, with his bosom swelling until it seemed that it must burst the unwonted garments which confined it.

One faithful soul was there whom conventions and the chill doubts that beset human hearts and brains did not restrain. With one leap Marcus crossed the space between the threshold and Polaris. He reared, and when his paws rested on the shoulders of the man, the eyes of the dog and man met.

One searching look gave Marcus, and whined; and it seemed as though his steadfast heart would break for joy. He dropped to all fours again. With every muscle in his splendid body aquiver, he backed against the man's legs and began to pivot around him slowly, baying the while to the full extent of his powerful lungs.

So Marcus told the world that he had found his master.

"Polaris! Found at last!" More slow, but no less joyfully than did Marcus, Rose Emer crossed from the doorway with extended hands. As she walked she limped ever so slightly; noting which, Polaris's lips were contracted with the pang of memory.

"Not yet," she said, when he would have spoken. She whirled from him to the scientists at the table. Every eye was on her.

"Gentleman," she began breathlessly, "you would not give this man a hearing because he is unknown to you, because he tells a strange story, and because he brought you no proof. I am Rose Emer, of whom you know. I wish to speak to you for a few moments. It is of this man's story that I wish to speak. Perhaps you shall have proof of the strangest that he has told. Certainly I shall tell you of stranger. Will you hear me?"

As she paused, President Dean, who was born a Virginian, was at her elbow with a chair. She took it, and sat facing the table. Polaris she motioned to come and stand by her, and he took his stand by her chair, with one hand resting upon its back and the other on the head of Marcus.

"We will listen with pleasure to what Miss Emer has to say," said President Dean, and resumed his seat.

"There are certain passages in the expedition to discover the pole which had not been told," she began. There was an almost imperceptible shifting of seats as the men at

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the table leaned forward to catch every word from the lips of the speaker. Scoland shot her a quick glance and then sat sullenly picking at a blotter that lay before him.

"There were certain happenings that have a mighty import for the world," she continued, "which have not been even so much as hinted at. They are in the keeping of this man here and myself. At his request I kept silent; now is the time to speak.

"Gentlemen, this man is neither poor nor without friends. All that I have is his. He saved my life down there in the ice and snow and horror—saved it and kept it, risking his own like a trifle a hundred times over. No, I *will* tell it all," as Polaris put forth a hand to restrain her.

With a dull red flush burning up in his cheeks, he folded his arms and gazed steadily through the windows as the girl went on, telling the spellbound assembly the amazing story.

When she had finished she looked narrowly at Captain Scoland, and said:

"I think that he was wise to decide to keep these things a secret until now. All of these things are true, and I, Rose Emer, witness for them. Now as to the other matter—the discoveries by this man's father and the message he sent to the north—here is that message."

From the bosom of her dress she drew an envelope-shaped packet sewn in membrane. She handed it to President Dean. Through the transparent skin that covered it, he saw on the yellowed paper that it was addressed to the National Geographic Society, and to "Zenas Wright, if he still be a member."

For a moment he turned it over in his hands. Then he passed it to Wright.

"Open it, old friend, and read," he said.

And this is what Zenas Wright read:

"Most of the contents of this packet are proofs, to be laid at the disposal of the society; for I have found the pole, Zenas. I have stood where no other man has ever stood. But that's in the proofs, Zenas—and you shall see them, if Polaris wins through with them. If not—why, then, one more vain dream.

"This is my son, Polaris, Zenas, who brings my message to the world. You remember I always wanted to do big things. Well, I decided to find the pole. I would go alone, and the glory of achievement would be mine alone. Now I am dying here in the snows, and the only human face I've seen for years is that of my son.

"Briefly, I took enough money from my estates to serve my purposes and went atraveling. Then I disappeared. I bought a ship, the Yedda, in Japan. I had her fitted out in Nagasaki and Hong Kong. Then I went to Australia. We sailed from there.

"Alas I met *her* before we sailed. I was mad. We eloped, and God forgive me, I took her with me. She was the daughter of a wealthy trader in Sydney, Horace Kering.

"We sailed into the snows. We camped, and I pushed through with dogs. I was gone months. I found the pole. I returned. They had deserted. The scoundrels had gone and left her; only the old cook was faithful. I never heard of them again, and often I hoped that they were lost.

"The child was born. She lived but a few short months. Then she went, too. The cook also, he's dead these many years. The boy lived.

"We would have come north together, but then I fell and hurt my leg. I will never travel. The boy, he's taken care of both of us for years. He knows not his own name, except that I call him Polaris. I've educated him. For years I've trained his mind. The life has trained his body. He's stronger than I ever was, and I was no weakling.

"When I go, he'll go to the north. That won't be long, now. My God, I've been here twenty-four years! What must have happened out in the world! But, Zenas, I'll not whine. Old comrade, if the boy comes, be good to him. He's a good lad. There's enough left of the old estate in California to make him rich, if it's been cared for. I've left him no letter, but tell him that his old father loved him well.

"Good-by, Zenas. "Stephen Janess."

Old Zenas Wright stopped reading and for a moment covered his eyes with his wrinkled hands. Then he raised his head. He fumbled with the papers.

"Here, the rest of them are observations and data," he said, and handed them back to President Dean. Members of the society elbowed each other to get a look at them. Under cover of the bustle, Polaris Janess clasped the hand of Rose Emer.

"Ah, lady," he whispered, "Polaris has a name at last—a name, and he is an American gentleman, and—" He broke off suddenly and crossed to the captain.

Scoland sat like a man in a dream.

"Yonder proofs there will show to the world my father's work. No lies have been told or written, Captain Scoland," said Polaris, speaking low. "You, too, have stood at the great pole. Your glory is just as great. You are a brave man. My father would not wish to rob you of that glory. I do not wish to stain the brightness of your achievement. What has passed between us is forgotten. You were blinded for a while. I remember naught but the kindness of your Dr. Clawson. Let us both be silent about the treatment of the 'wild man.'"

He held out his hand.

For the barest fraction of a second Scoland hesitated. He was not an entirely bad man. He was a very brave one. He gripped the hand of the son of the snows.

"And now," he said with an effort, "she's

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waiting; go to her." He pointed to Rose Emer.

Around the end of the table came marching Zenas Wright, his old eyes shining. He came upon a tableau—a girl and a man and a dog, all wordless, all eyes.

"H-m-m-m, Zenas, you're an old fool!" he muttered. "They have no eyes for you just now." He turned to stump back to the table, but thought better of it and came back.

"Lad," he said, "we—the members of this society—wish to examine the records of your father's discoveries. We may want to ask you some questions. Will you wait, you and the young woman—in here?"

HE MARCHED them to a small, empty room at the side, and almost thrust them into it. Marcus edged in with them. The door was shut. They were alone.

Both of them stared out of the window. Minutes passed. Then:

"Lady, how did you find me?"

"One cannot sell three great rubies at the door of a jail, sir, and go quite unnoticed," she answered, flushing. "My agents were on the watch. They investigated, and I came on from Boston."

Still she did not look at him. Polaris came a little nearer.

"Why did you tell them all—"

"That you are a hero!" she flashed hotly. "I want all the world to know it!" She faced him at last.

"And—but—the captain?"

She looked at him.

In a second his arms were around her. For the second time their lips met. Time flew by unheeded. Marcus looked at them in wonder, and then curled calmly on a rug and stretched his nose.

Finally:

"But I am only a poor, half-savage—"

"Hush! I love you!"

Presently they heard through the closed door the muffled sound of shouting. It was the members of the society cheering Stephen Janess.

This is the first of a group of three famous "Polaris" stories. The next of the trilogy is "Minos of Sardanes."

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Serapion

By Francis Stevens

Author of "Claimed", "The Citadel of Fear", etc.

"An evil influence has been brought into touch with you," the medium warned Clayton Barbour. "A dead soul seeks to destroy your life that it may itself go on living." At that moment Barbour began his grim struggle for possession of himself

IT BEGAN because, meeting Nils Berquist in town one August morning, he dragged me off for luncheon at a little restaurant on a side street where he swore I should meet some of the rising geniuses of the century.

What we did meet was the commencement for me of such an extraordinary experience as befalls few men. At the time, however, the whole affair seemed incidental, with a spice of grotesque but harmless absurdity. Jimmy Moore and his Alicia! How could anyone, meeting them as I did, have believed a grimness behind their amusing eccentricity?

I was just turned twenty-four that August day. A boy's guileless enthusiasm for the untried was still strong in me, coupled with a tendency to make friends in all quarters, desirable or otherwise. Almost anyone who liked me, I liked. My college years, very recently ended, had seen me sworn comrade to a reckless and on-his-way-to-be-notorious son of plutocracy, while I was also well received in the room which Nils Berquist shared with two other embryo socialists of fanatic dye. A certain ingenuous likableness must have been mine even then, I think, to have gained me not only toleration, but real friendship in both camps.

Berquist was older than I by several years. He had earned his college days before enjoying them and, college ended, he dropped back into the struggle for existence and out of my sight—till I ran across him in town that August day.

To play host even at a very moderate luncheon must have been an extravagance for Nils, though I didn't think of that. He was a man with whom one somehow never associated the idea of need. Tall, lean, with a dark, long face, high cheek-bones and deep eyes set well apart, he dressed badly and walked the world in a careless air of ownership that mere clothes could not in the least affect.

His intimates knew him capable of vast, sudden enthusiasms, and equally vast depressions of the spirit. But up or down, he was Nils Berquist, sufficient unto himself, asking no favors, and always with an indefinable air of being well able to grant them.

I admired and liked him, was very glad to see him again, and cheerfully let him steer me around two corners and in the door of his bragged-of trysting place.

On first entering, my friend cast an eye about the aggregation of more or less shabby individuals present and muttered: "Not a soul here!" in a disappointed tone. Then, glimpsing a couple seated at a corner table laid for four, he brightened a trifle and led me over to them.

Nils's idea of formal presentation was always more brief than elaborate. After addressing the fair-haired, light-eyelashed, Palm-Beach-suited person on one side of the table as "Jimmy" and his *vis-à-vis*, a darkly mysterious lady in a purple veil, as "Alicia," he referred to me casually as "Clay," and considered the introduction complete.

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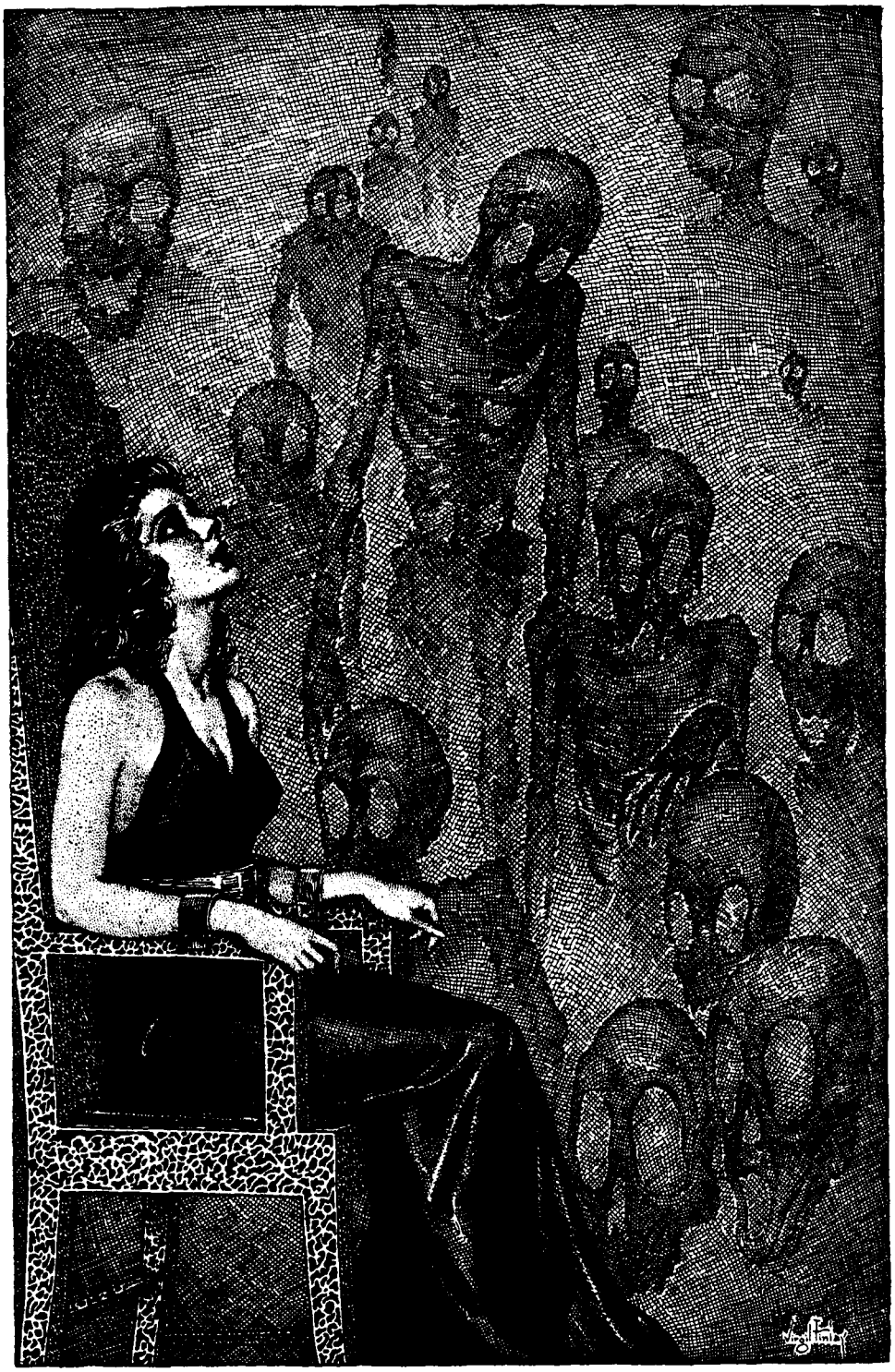

Presently the hushed whisper was heard again. "Many shadows are here tonight," it said. "Shadows living and dead. Dead alive and living dead. They crowd close. . . ."

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I do not mean that the lady's costume was limited to the veil. Only that this article was of such peculiar, brilliantly, fascinatingly ugly hue that the rest of her might have been clothed in anything from a mermaid's scales to a speckled calico wrapper; I can image nothing except a gown of the same color which would have distracted one's attention from that veil.

The thing was draped over a small hat and hung all about her head and face in a sort of circular curtain. Behind it I became aware of two dark bright eyes watching me, like the eyes of some sea creature, laired behind a highly futurist wave. Having met peculiar folk before in Berquist's company, I took a seat opposite the veil without embarrassment.

"CHARMING little place, this," I lied, glancing about the low-ceilinged, semiventilated, architectural container for chairs, tables and genius which formed a background to the veil. "Sorry I didn't discover it earlier."

The dark eyes gleamed immovably from their lair. I essayed a direct question. "You lunch here frequently, I presume?"

No answer. The veil didn't so much as quiver. Even my genial amity began to suffer a chill.

Suddenly "Jimmy" of the Palm Beach suit transferred his attention from Berquist to me. "Please don't try to talk with Alicia," he said. "She is in the silence today. If you draw her out it will disturb the vibrations for a week and make the deuce of a hole in my work. Do you mind?"

With a slight gasp I adjusted myself to the unusual. I said I didn't mind anything.

"You're the right sort, then. Might have known it, or you wouldn't be traveling with old man Nils, eh? What you going to have? Nothing worth eating except the broiled bluefish, and that's scorched. Always is. What you eating, Nils?"

"Rice," said Berquist briefly.

"On the one-dish-at-a-time diet, eh? Great stuff, if you can stick it out. Make an athlete out of a centenarian — *if* you can stick it out. Bluefish for—one or two?" he added, addressing the waiter and myself in the same sentence.

"Two," I smiled. Palm Beach Jimmy seemed to have usurped my friend's rôle of host with calm casualism. The man's blond hair and faintly yellow lashes and eyebrows robbed his face of emphasis, so that the remarkably square chin and high, sloping forehead did not impress one at first. His way of assuming direction of even the slightest affairs about him struck me as easy-going and careless, rather than domineering.

He gave the rest of the order, with an occasional kindly reference to my desires. "And boiled rice for one," he finished.

The waiter cast a curious glance at the purple veil. "Nothing for the lady?" he queried.

"Seaweed, of course," retorted Jimmy. "You're new at this table, aren't you?"

"Just started working here. Seaweed, sir?"

"Certainly. There it is, staring you in the face under 'Salads.' Study your menu, man. That," explained Jimmy, after the waiter's somewhat dazed departure, "is the only reason we come here. One place I know of that serves *rhodymenia serrata*. Great stuff. Rich in mineral salts and vitamins."

"You didn't order any for yourself," I ventured.

"No. Great stuff, but has a horrid taste. Simply—horrid! Alicia eats it as a martyr to the cause. We have to be careful of her diet. Very—careful; Nils, old man, what's the new wrong to the human race you're being so silent over?"

"Can't say without becoming personal," retorted Berquist calmly.

"What? Oh, I forgot you don't approve. Still clinging to the sacred barriers, eh?"

"The barriers exist, and they are sacred." Nils's long, dark face was solemn, but as he was capable of cracking the wildest jokes with just that solemn expression, I wasn't sure if the conversation were light or serious. I only knew that as yet I had failed to get a grip on the situation. The man talked about his seaweed-fed Alicia as if the lady were not present.

What curiosity in human shape did that veil hide? One thing I was uneasily aware of. Not once, since the moment of our arrival had those laired bright eyes strayed from my face.

"The barriers exist," Berquist repeated. "I do not believe that you or others like you can tear them down. If I did, I should be justified in taking your life, as though you were any other dangerous criminal. When those barriers go down, chaos will swallow the world, and the race of men be superseded by the race of madmen!"

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Jimmy laughed, unstartled by my friend's reference to cold-blooded assassination. "In the world of science," he retorted, "what one can do, one may do. If every investigator of novel fields had stopped his work for fear of scorched fingers—"

"In the material, physical world," interrupted Berquist, speaking in the same solemn, dogmatic tone, "what one can do, one may do. There, the worst punishment of a step too far can be only the loss of life or limb. It isn't man's rightful workshop. Let him learn its tools at the cost of a cut or so. But the field that you would invade is forbidden."

"By whom? By what?"

"By its nature! A man who risks his life may be a hero, but what is the name for a man who risks his soul?"

"Oh, Nils—Nils! You anachronism! You—you inquisitioner! Here! You say the physical world is open ground—don't you?"

"Yes."

"And what is commonly referred to as the 'supernatural' is forbidden?"

"In the sense we speak of—yes."

"Very well. Now, where do you draw the fine dividing line? How do you know that your soul, as you call it, isn't just another finer form of matter? A good medium—Alicia here can do it—stretches out a tenuous arm, a misty, wraithy, semiformless limb, and lifts a ten-pound weight off the table while her 'physical' hands and feet are bound so they can't stir an inch. Telikinesis, that is called, or levitation, and you talk about it as if it were done by some sort of supernatural will power.

"Will power, yes; but will actuating matter to move matter. That fluidic arm is just as 'material,' though not so substantial, as your own husky biceps. It's thinner—different. But material—of course it's material! Why, you yourself are a walking case of miraculous levitation. Will moving matter. Will, a superphysical force generated on the physical plane. Where's your fine dividing line? You talk about the material plane—"

"I won't any more," broke in Berquist hastily. "But *you* know that there are entities and forces dangerous to the human race outside of what we call the natural world, and that your investigations are no better than a sawing at the bars of a cageful of tigers. If I thought you could loose them, I have already told you what I would do!"

THERE was a dark gleam in Berquist's deep-set eyes that suddenly warned me he meant exactly what he said—though the meaning of the whole argument was as hazy to me as the face behind that astounding veil.

Jimmy himself looked sober. "Here comes your rice," he said shortly. "Eat it, you old vegetarian, and get off the murder subject. I'll expect you to be coming around some night with a carving knife, if you say much more."

"There are police to guard you from the carving knife. The wild marches between this world and the invisible are patrolled by no police. Yet you fear the knife which can harm only your body, and fearlessly expose your naked soul!"

"Thanks, old man, but my soul is well able to take care of itself. Eat your rice. There! Didn't I say the bluefish would be scorched? And it is. Behold, a prophet among you!"

The bluefish wasn't worrying me. What I was awaiting was the moment when that miraculously colored veil should be uplifted. Surely, her purple screen removed, the lady would cease to stare me out of countenance.

Before the veil a large platter of straggling, saw-edged, brownish-red leaves had been set down. The dish looked as horrid as Jimmy said it tasted. In a quiver of impatience I waited. At last I should see—

A hand, white and well shaped, but slender to emaciation, was raised to the veil's lower edge. The edge was lifted slightly. Another hand conveyed a modest forkful of the uncanny edible upward. It passed behind the veil. The fork came away empty.

With a gasping sigh I relinquished hope, and turned my attention to scorched bluefish.

Jimmy may have noted my emotion. "When Alicia is in the silence," he offered, "she has to be guarded. The vibratory rhythm of the violet light waves is less harmful than the rest of the spectrum. Hence, the veil. Invention of my own. You agree with our wild anarchist here, Mr.—er—Clay? Sacred barrierist and all that?"

"My name's Barbour," I said. "Clayton S. Barbour. As for the barriers, I must admit you've been talking over my head."

"So? Don't believe it. Pardon me, but your head doesn't look that sort. Hasn't Nils told you what I'm doing?"

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"Nils," said Berquist, with what would have been cold insolence from anyone else, "has something better to do than walk about the world exploiting you to his acquaintances."

"I'm smashed—crushed flat," laughed Jimmy. He seemed one of the most good-humored individuals I had ever met. "Never mind, anarchist. I'll tend to it myself." He turned again to me. "Come to think of it, one of Nils's introductions is an efficient disguise. I'm James Barton Moore."

I murmured polite gratification. For the life of me I couldn't recall hearing the name before. His perception was as quick as his good humor. That ready laugh broke out again.

"Never heard of me, eh? That's a fault of mine—expect the whole world to be thrillingly expectant of results from my work. Ever hear of the Psychic Research Association?"

"Certainly." I looked as intelligent as possible. "Investigate ghosts and haunted houses and all that, don't they?"

"You're right, son. Ghosts and haunted houses about cover the Association's metier. Bah! Do you know who I am?"

"A member?" I hazarded.

"Not exactly. I'm the man the Association forced off its directing board. And I'm also the man who is going to make the Association look like a crowd of children hunting spooks in the nursery. Come around to my place tonight and I'll show you something!"

The invitation was so explosively abrupt that I started in my chair.

"Why—er—" I began.

Nils broke in again. "Don't go," he said coolly.

"Let him alone!" enjoined Moore, but with no sign of irritation. "You drop in around seven—here," he scribbled an address on the back of a card and tossed it across the table, "and I'll promise you an interesting evening."

"You are very good," I said, not knowing quite what to do. I already had an engagement for that evening; on the other hand, my ever-ready curiosity had been aroused.

"Don't go," repeated Berquist tonelessly.

"Thanks, but I believe I will."

"Good! You're the right sort. Knew it the minute I set eyes on you. Don't extend these invitations to everyone. Not—by—any means."

Berquist pushed back his chair.

"Are you going on with me, Clay?" he inquired.

I thought he was carrying his peculiar style of rudeness rather beyond the boundaries; but he was really my host, so I acquiesced. I took pains, however, to bid a particularly courteous farewell to the eccentric pair with whom we had lunched. I might or might not keep my appointment with Moore, but if I did I wished to be sure of a welcome.

WITH me the influence of a personality, however strong, ended where its line of direction crossed the course of my own wishes. Nils's opposition to my further acquaintance with the Moores had struck me as decidedly officious.

Once outside the restaurant, he turned on me almost savagely.

"Clay," he said, "you are not going up there tonight!"

"No?" I asked coldly. "And why not?"

"You don't know what you might be let in for. That is why not."

"You have an odd way of talking about your friends."

"Oh, Moore knows what I think."

"All right," I grinned, not really wishing a quarrel if one could be avoided. "But your friends are good enough for me, too, Nils. Who was the lady in the veil?"

"His wife. A physical medium—Heaven help her!"

"Spirit rapping, clairvoyant and all that, eh? I supposed it was something of the sort. Well, if I wish to go out to their place and spend a dollar or so to watch some conjuring tricks, why do you object so strenuously? That's one thing I've never done—"

"Spend a dollar or so!" snapped Berquist. "Those people are not professionals, Clay. Mrs. Moore is one of the few genuine mediums in this country."

"Oh, come! Surely you're not a believer in table-tipping and messages from Marcus Aurelius and Shakespeare?"

Berquist squinted at me disgustedly.

"Heaven help me save this infant!" he muttered, taking no pains, however, that I shouldn't hear him. "Clay, you go home and stay among your own people. Jimmy Moore is a moderately good fellow, but in one certain line he's as voracious as a wolf and unscrupulous as a Corsican bandit. He told you that he didn't extend these invitations

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to everyone. That is strictly true. The fact that he extended one to you is proof sufficient that you should not accept. He saw in you something he's continually on the watch for. He would use you and wreck you without a scruple."

"How? What do you mean?"

"If I should tell you in what way, you would laugh and call it impossible. But, let me say something you can understand. Except casually, Moore is not a pleasant man to know. He would like people to believe that he was dropped from the administrative board of the Association because his investigations and inferences were too daring for even the extraordinary open types of mind which compose it. The real reason was that he proved so violently, overbearingly quarrelsome that even they couldn't tolerate him."

Recalling Moore's impregnable good humor under Nils's own attacks, I began to wonder exactly what was the latter's object.

"I'm not going there to quarrel with him," I said.

"No; you're going to be used by him. Look at that unfortunate little wife of his, if you want a horrible example."

"D'you mean he'd obscure my classic features with a purple veil? There'll be a fight to the finish first, believe me!"

"Oh, that veil-vibration-seaweed business —that's all rot. Just freak results of freak theorizing. Froth and bubbles. It's the dark brew underneath that's dangerous."

"Witch's scene in Macbeth," I chuckled. "Fire burn and caldron bubble! We now see Mr. Jimmy Moore in his famous personation of Beelzebub — costume, one Palm Beach suit and a cheerful grin. Don't worry, Nils! I'll bolt through the window at the first whiff of brimstone."

"My child," said Berquist, very gently and slowly, "you have the joyous courage of ignorance. Alicia Moore is that rare freak, a real materializing medium—a producer of supernormal physical phenomena, as they are called. In other words, she is an open channel for forces which are neither understood nor recognized by the average civilized man. And Jimmy Moore is that much more common freak, a fool who doesn't care whose fingers get burnt. The responsibility for having introduced you to those people is mine. As a personal favor, I now ask you to have nothing more to do with either of them."

"Nils, you're back in the dark ages, as Moore claimed. I never thought you'd fall for this spiritualistic bunk."

"Leave that. You are determined to keep the appointment?"

"Come with me, if you think I need a chaperon."

"No," he said soberly.

"Why not?"

"He wouldn't have me. Not when a seance is planned, and that is what he meant by an 'interesting evening.' I'm *persona non grata* on such an occasion, because Alicia says her spirit guides don't like me—save the mark! If I tried to wedge in tonight there would be another row, and Heaven alone knows where the thing would end. I wish you'd stay away from there!"

"Do you mean," I asked slowly, and beginning to see new light on Nils's attitude, "that you have quarreled with Moore in the past?"

"My dear fellow, get this through your head if you can. It is impossible to know Moore very long and not quarrel with him —or be subjugated. You keep away."

I was growing a little sick of Nils's persistence.

"Sorry. Fear I haven't your faith in the bodiless powers of evil, and I can't say Moore seemed such an appalling person. I'm going!"

Abruptly, without a word of answer or farewell, Berquist turned his back on me and swung off down street. Several times I had seen him end a conversation in that manner, and I knew why. By rights, he should have been the last man to criticize another man's temper.

But I knew, too, that Nils's wrath was generally as evanescent as sudden. He would be friendly as ever next time we met, and even if he were not, I couldn't see why his anger or disapproval should afflict me greatly. Friends were too easily acquired for me to miss one.

I forgot him promptly, and began wondering how my desertion for the evening would be accepted by Roberta Whitingfield.

CHAPTER II

THE DEAD-ALIVE HOUSE

THAT afternoon I reached home to find Roberta herself on the veranda with my sister Catherine. Rather to my consterna-

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tion, on hearing of the restaurant encounter, Bert promptly dubbed it, "The Adventure of the Awful Veiled One," and announced her intent to solve the mystery in my company. Catherine seconded the motion, calmly including herself in the party, but there I rebelled.

Roberta and I were to be married one of these days. She was mine to command me.

I had a vague idea of what Moore's invitation portended, and I knew what would happen if I took both those girls and anything unusual occurred. They would giggle.

We kept Roberta with us for dinner, and when she had gone home to dress, Cathy and I had our argument in earnest. My mother was confined to her room with one of her frequent headaches, and for a while dad hid himself in his paper. Then a grizzled head appeared over the top of it.

"Cathy," he drawled, "I haven't a notion what this is all about, but wherever Clay is off to, I'm sure he doesn't want two girls. Clay, I don't wish to be rude, but *if* you are going, won't you please depart at once? Run upstairs, Catherine, and see if all this loud talking has disturbed your mother."

Cathy went. She knew better than to oppose dad when he used that tone.

That evening I called for Roberta in my car, and after nine o'clock we arrived at the address written across Moore's card. It turned out to be half of a detached double dwelling, standing on a corner beyond a block of quiet, respectable red-stone fronts, with a deep lawn between it and the street.

"Ridiculous house," Bert named it on first sight, and ridiculous house it was in a certain sense. It reminded one of that king in the old fairy tale who "laughed with one side of his face and smiled with the other."

The half that bore Moore's number was neat, shining and of unimpeachable exterior. Its yellow brick front was clean, with freshly painted white woodwork; its half of the lawn, close-clipped and green, was set with little thriving round flower beds.

The other half had the look of a regular old beggar among houses. The paint, weather-beaten, blistered and brown, was no dingier than the dirt-freckled bricks. Two or three windows were boarded up. Not one of the rest but mourned a broken pane or so. From the dilapidated porch wooden steps all askew led to a weed-grown walk. On that side the lawn was a straggling waste of weeds.

Roberta had hopped out of the car without waiting for assistance. I joined her and we stood staring at the queer-looking combination.

"Roberta," I said solemnly after a moment, "there is a grim, grisly secret which I hadn't meant to alarm you with, but perhaps it is better you should be warned now."

"Clay! What do you mean?"

"That house!" My voice was a sinister whisper. "Don't you see? Life and death, or chained to the corpse of his victim! Moore murdered one of the twin houses, and now he must live in the other house as a pennance."

To my surprise, instead of laughing at my nonsense, she took my arm with a shiver. "Don't!" she protested. "When you speak so the house isn't funny any more. It's—horrid. A—a dead-alive house! Let's not go in, Clay."

I felt annoyed, for this last-moment retreat was not like her. I said, "Come along, Berty, and don't be silly. I suppose one half belongs to Moore and the other to somebody else, and he can't make the other owner keep his half in repair."

After some further discussion, we entered the gate at last. I remembered that as we went up Moore's walk, I threw back my head and glanced upward. The moonlight was so white on the slanting house roofs that for just a moment I had an illusion of their being thick with snow.

With snow. Yes, I remembered that illusion afterward.

MOORE had expected me alone, of course, but he needn't have made that fact quite so obvious. He met us in his library on the second floor, whither a neat, commonplace maid had ushered us after a glance at my card.

It was a long, rather heavily furnished room, lined with books to the ceiling. Our first view of it noted nothing bizarre or out of the ordinary. Moore was seated reading, but as we were announced he rose quickly. It was when he perceived Roberta and realized that I had brought a companion that I had my first real doubt that Nils had not exaggerated about the man's temper.

His good-humored, full-lipped mouth seemed to draw inward and straighten to a disagreeably gashlike effect. The skin over his cheek-bones tightened. A pronounced narrowness between the eyes forced itself

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suddenly upon the attention. For one instant we faced a man disagreeably different from the one who had parried all Berquist's thrusts with unshakable good nature.

As he rose and came toward us, however, the ominous look melted again to geniality. "Began to think old Nils had scared you off in earnest, Barbour," he greeted. "Witch burnings would still be in order if our wild anarchist had his way, eh?"

Rather reluctantly I performed the necessary introductions.

"I had no right to come with Clayton," Roberta apologized. "But when he told me of your invitation, I—we thought—"

"That you might find some amusement here?" Moore finished for her. "That's all right, Miss Whitingfield, though the work I am engaged in is a bit serious to be amusing, I fear. Hope you're not the nervous, screaming sort?" he added, with blunt anxiety.

She flushed a trifle, then laughed. "I'm not—really!" she protested. "But I'll go away if you wish."

That was too much for me. "We'll both leave," I said very haughtily. "Sorry to have put you out, Mr. Moore."

To my astonishment, for I was really angry, he burst out laughing. It was such a genial, inoffensive merriment as caught me unawares. I found myself laughing with him, though at what I hadn't the faintest notion.

"Why, Barbour," he chuckled, "you mustn't take offense at a lack of conventional mannerisms on my part. I'm a worker—first, last and all the time. Miss Whitingfield, you're welcome as the flowers in May, but I can no more forget my work nor what is likely to affect it than I can forget my own name. You aren't angry with me, are you?"

"N-no—" she began rather hesitatingly, but just then the door opened behind us and we heard someone enter.

"I am here!"

The words were uttered in a dry, toneless voice. We both turned, and I realized that the "Mystery of the Awful Veiled One" was a mystery no more, or at least had been shorn of its purple drapery.

Of course, I had expected to meet Alicia here, but I think I should have recognized those eyes in any surroundings. They were fully as bright, dark, and almost incredibly large and attentive as they had seemed behind the veil. For the rest, Mrs. Moore's slender figure was draped in filmy black, between which and a mass of black hair her face gleamed, a peaked white patch—and with those eyes in it.

"Medium" or not, Mrs. Moore herself was more like the creature of another world than any human being I had ever seen.

"Be seated, Alicia."

Without troubling to present Roberta, Moore gestured toward a peculiar-looking chair at one side of the room. The slender creature in black swept toward it obediently.

Having reached the chair, she turned, faced us for a moment, still expressionless save for those terribly attentive eyes, then sank into the chair's depths.

Roberta was frankly staring, and so was I, but my stare had a newly startled quality. Alicia had passed me very closely indeed. My hand still tingled where another hand—a bony, fierce little hand—had closed on it in a swift, pinching clasp. And though I was sure that her colorless lips had not moved, four low words had reached my ears distinctly.

"Go away—*you!* Go."

I glanced at Berty, but decided that she had missed the rude little message. Moore certainly hadn't heard, for he had gone over to the chair and was standing behind it when Alicia reached there.

With a slight shrug I determined that where so much oddity prevailed, this additional eccentricity of Mrs. Moore had better be ignored. To think of her as a real person—my hostess—was made difficult by the atmosphere of utter strangeness which her appearance and Moore's treatment of her had already created.

"You and Miss Whitingfield sit over there," commanded Moore briskly.

"I'll explain what we're about in a minute. You'll be interested. Can't avoid it. A little farther off, Miss Whitingfield—d'you mind? Alicia is more easily affected than other sensitives. More — easily — affected. Right! Now just a moment and I can talk to you."

We had seated ourselves as he directed, I some half dozen feet from the enthroned Alicia, Roberta much farther away, well over by the heavily curtained windows.

To the savage and to the young "strange" is generally synonymous with "funny." We exchanged one quick look, then kept our eyes resolutely apart. A wave of incipient mirth had fairly leaped between us. It was well, I thought, that Cathy had been suppressed.

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Then we saw what Moore was doing at the chair, and forgot laughter in amazement. It must be remembered that Roberta and I were innocent of the least previous experience in this line. Save for some hazy knowledge of "spiritualistic fakes" and "mind-reading" of the vaudeville type, we were blankly ignorant, and by consequence as unconsciously receptive as a couple of innocent young sponges. But at first we were merely shocked by the brutal fact of Moore's preparations.

I HAVE said that the chair taken by Alicia was a peculiar one. It stood before a pair of black curtains, which concealed what in spiritualistic circles is called a cabinet. The chair itself was large, heavy, with a high back and uncommonly broad arm-rests. More, it had about it that look of "apparatus" which one associates with dentists' and surgeons' fixtures. Alicia leaned back in it, her hands resting limp on the arm-rests.

Then up over each fragile wrist Moore clamped a kind of steel handcuff, attached to the chair arm. Another pair of similar fetters, extended on short rods from the back, were clasped round her upper arms. And, as if this were not enough, he locked together the two halves of a wide steel band about her waist.

And his wife sat there, inert as a porcelain doll, her enormous eyes wide open and fixed on me in perfectly unswerving contemplation.

"All really great mediums will trick you if they can," said Moore coolly. "Don't need any object for fraud. Unless you should call the trickery itself an object. Alicia is a great medium. Very—great!"

Suddenly every decent impulse I had rose to revolt. That was a woman in the chair—*Moore's wife*—and he treated her, talked about her, as though she were some peculiarly trained and subject animal.

I rose sharply. "Mrs. Moore, is this affair proceeding with your consent?"

"Don't address the psychic!" snapped her husband over one shoulder.

But I wasn't afraid of him. At that moment I could have thrashed the man cheerfully—and with ease, for I carried no superfluous flesh in those days, and had inches the better of him in height and reach. Roberta was suddenly at my side, and I knew by the excited shine of her eyes that she sensed my emotion and approved it.

"Mrs. Moore," I repeated, "are you enduring this of your own free will? Moore, attempt to intimidate her, and you'll be sorry!"

He straightened, and turned on me in earnest, but Alicia herself broke the strain.

"Sit down, boy," she said in her dry, toneless voice. "What James says of fraud is true. But he does not mean what you think. I am not conscious of what I do in trance, and the self then in control has no moral standards. Were my earthly limbs not bound, no phenomena could be credited. and my own guides have advised the construction of the chair. The steel bands are padded with felt, and do not hurt me. I did not speak to you when I entered, because at some times the guides like me to be silent. This is tiring me. You must not quarrel with James. Violent emotion tires me. A great evil will come to you through me, but now you must sit down and be very quiet. I am tired."

For the first time, white lids drooped over those unnatural eyes. The closing of them seemed to rob her face of the last trace of fellow-humanity. Moore was grinning again, though rather tensely.

"Please sit down, Barbour," he pleaded in a very low voice. "I should have explained a few things to you in advance. Alicia will be asleep directly, and then we can talk."

I did sit down, and Roberta retired to her window. That toneless, indifferent voice of Alicia's, that cool exactitude of statement, had not seemed the expression of a meek and terrorized soul. But if she were not afraid of Moore, why had she been so surreptitious in asking—in ordering me to leave? "I did not speak to you when I entered—" But she had spoken to me. "A great evil will come to you through me—" And she said it like a remark on the weather!

I gave up suddenly. All my curiosity was submerged in a wave of healthy revolt against the obviously abnormal. A vague unhappiness came with it, and the desire above everything to take Roberta and get out.

Alicia was breathing regularly now, in long, deep breaths, soft but audible. Leaving her, Moore drew up a chair between Roberta and me, seated himself, crossed one leg over his knee, and beamed amiably.

"Mr. Moore," I began, but he checked me, finger in air.

"Sh! Trifle lower, please. I know what you're thinking, Barbour, and I don't blame

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you. Not in—the—least! My fault entirely. Now let's drop all that and forget it. You are two very intelligent people, but I can never remember that the average man or woman knows as much about sensitives as a baby knows of trigonometry. Now, why did I invite you here, Barbour?"

"For an interesting evening, you said."

"Ex-actly! And you'll have it. First of many, I hope. But don't expect any messages from your deceased grandfathers tonight, for you won't get 'em."

"Very well," I assented. "Bert, do you hear that? Our revered ancestors won't speak to us!"

"And don't imagine this is a matter for joking, either," reproved Moore, but still amiably. "I did not say that purely spiritual forces would not be involved. But a psychic—a medium—has all the complexity of the highest type of nervous human—plus. And it's the plus sign that complicates matters. You might get messages through from almost anyone—eventually. You'll seem to get them tonight. But they won't be real. Alicia has more different selves than the proverbial cat has lives. And all wanting a chance to talk, and parade around, and pass themselves off as anybody you'd care to name, from Julius Caesar to your mother's deceased aunt's nephew. Very—remarkable!"

"I should say so!"

WE GLANCED rather anxiously at Alicia's quiescent figure. But no sudden procession of selves had yet appeared.

"That, however, is beside the mark," announced Moore briskly. "In such commonplace manifestations, Alicia dematerializes a percentage of her own fleshly bulk, externalizes and projects it from her subliminal consciousness. Aside from proving the accepted laws of matter to be false, the phenomena are of small importance."

He paused again.

"I should think," ventured Roberta, carefully avoiding my eyes, "that disproving the laws of matter would be—might be almost enough for one evening."

"The accepted laws," he corrected rather sharply. "Crooks—Oschorowicz—Lombroso—Bottazzi—Lodge—I could name you over a dozen great scientists who have already disproved them in that way. But they had only Eusapia Paladino and lesser psychics to work with. We have—Alicia!"

A vague memory stirred in me. "Paladino?" I said. "You mean the famous Italian medium? I thought she was exposed as a fraud."

He frowned. This was a sore subject with him, though I did not know why till much later.

"I tell you," he scowled, "they are all frauds—when they have the chance. The first impulse of hysteria is toward deception. Genuine mediumship and hysteria are practically inseparable. What can you expect? Paladino was as genuine as Alicia, and Alicia will fool you outrageously, given the least opportunity. Quite—scandalously—unscrupulous!"

"You're very frank about it," I couldn't help saying.

"Why not? You heard Alicia's own statement in that regard. She works with me to overcome the disadvantage. Mabel and Maudie are manageable enough, but Horace is a born joker. For a long time Horace fought bitterly against the idea of that chair, and only yielded when I threatened to give up the sittings."

"These people are friends who attend the seances?" I inquired, thinking that Moore had Nils's habit of referring to all his acquaintances by their Christian names.

Moore appeared mildly surprised.

"Don't you really know anything at all of spiritualistic investigation?"

"Sorry. I'm afraid I've never had enough faith in spooks to be interested."

"Never mind. We'll correct that!" assured Moore calmly. "Mabel and Maudie and Horace are three of Alicia's spirit guides. She believes them to be real entities of the spirit world—people who have passed beyond, you understand—but I doubt it. Doubt it—very seriously! In fact, I have reason to be positive that those three, along with several subsidiary 'spirits,' are just so many phases of Alicia's subconscious. On the other hand, Jason Gibbs, her real 'control,' is a spirit to be reckoned with. You will find Jason an amazingly interesting man on acquaintance. And now that I have explained fully, suppose we take a look at the cabinet?"

Roberta and I rose and followed him, not sure whether to be amused or impressed. His statement that he had "explained fully" was a joke, so far as we were concerned. What nebulous ideas of a seance we had possessed were far removed from anything we had met tonight. To sit in a circle, holding hands in

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the dark; to hear mysterious raps and poundings; to glimpse, perhaps, the cheese-clothy forms of highly fictitious "ghosts"—that had been our previous conception of a "sitting" culled from general and half-forgotten reading.

Moore was so utterly matter-of-fact and unmystical of manner that he probably impressed us more deeply than if he had attempted to inspire awe.

And, I reflected, if he were a charlatan, where was his profit? Nils himself had assured me that Mrs. Moore was not a professional medium.

The fact was that I had emerged from college almost wholly ignorant of the modern debate between the physicist and the spiritist—ignorant that science itself had been driven to admission of supernormal powers in certain "victims of hysteria," but stood firm on the ground that these powers were of physical and terrestrial origin.

James Barton Moore, however, was a born materialist who had accepted the spiritistic theory from an intellectual viewpoint. The result showed in his matter-of-fact way of dealing with the occult. He had, moreover, one characteristic of a certain type of scientist in less weird fields. He would have put a stranger or his best friend on the vivisectionary table, could he by that means have hoped to acquire one small modicum of the knowledge he sought.

Figuratively, he already had me on the table that night.

CHAPTER III

"HORACE"

ON PUSHING aside the black curtains, the cabinet proved to be a place like a square closet, with a smooth, solid wooden back, built out from the wall. In it there stood a small, rather heavy table, made of polished oak, on which reposed several objects.

There was a thing like a small megaphone, to which Moore referred as the "cone." There was an ordinary glass tumbler, nearly filled with water; a lump of soft putty; a sheet of paper blackened by sooty smoke; a pad of ordinary white paper, and several pencils, of different colors and sizes.

"Our preparations tonight," said Moore, "are of the simplest sort. I have passed the stage of registering Alicia's externalized motivity by means of instruments of precision. The exact force exerted to lift a weight yards beyond her bodily reach, the regulated rhythm of a metronome's pendulum, the compression of a pneumatic bulb ten feet from her hand—these have all been tested, proved and left behind me. Others have done that with other mediums.

"But I go the step further that Bottazzi and many others dared not take. Having admitted the phenomena, I admit a cause for them outside the physical and beyond Alicia's individuality. I admit the disembodied spirit. My experiments are no longer based on doubt, but certainty. Their culmination will mean a revolution for the thinking world—a reversal of its whole stand toward matter and the forces that affect it."

Roberta and I were not particularly interested in revolutions of thought. Like younger children, we wished to know what he proposed doing with the things on the table, and after that we wished to see it done. So we stood silent, hoping that he would stop talking soon and let the exhibition of Alicia's mysterious powers begin.

Being off on his hobby, Moore probably mistook our silence for interest. At last, however, in the midst of a dissertation on "psychic force," "telikinesis" and "spiritual controls," he was interrupted by a long, deep sigh from the chair. The sigh was followed by a strangled gasping, very much as though Alicia were choking to death.

We both started toward the chair, but Moore barred the way.

"Let her alone!" he ordered imperatively. "She's all right. Come back to your seats." And when we had returned to our former positions, he added: "She is going into trance now. Later you may approach closer—hold her hands, if you like. But Alicia can't bear even myself to be very near her in the first stages. It hurts her, you understand. Gives her physical pain."

Judging from poor Alicia's appearance, she was in physical pain anyway. Her peaked white face writhed in the most unpleasant contortions. She choked, gasped, gurgled, and showed every symptom of a woman in dying agonies. Then suddenly she quieted, her face resumed its lay-figure calmness, and the great eyes opened wide.

"Differs from most psychics. Opens her eyes in trance. Quite—frequently!" I heard Moore muttering; but Alicia herself began to speak now, and I forgot him.

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The curtains of the cabinet flew open and a huge black hand darted straight into Roberta's face!

The queerest, silliest little voice issued from her lips. It was like a child's voice, but an idiot child's.

"Pretty, pretty, pretty!" it gurgled. "Oh, such a pretty lady! Did pretty lady come to see Maudie?" Followed a pause. When it spoke again the voice had a petulant note: "*Did* pretty lady come to see Maudie?"

Moore looked at Roberta. "Why don't you answer her, Miss Whitingfield?"

Before she could comply, however, another personality had apparently superseded the idiot child. A great laugh that I would have sworn was a man's echoed across the silent library. It seemed to come from Alicia's throat.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, ha, ha! You've got queer taste, Jimmy Moore! Why d'you want to drag that pair of freaks in here? Tell 'em to go home! Go on home, young fellow, d'you hear? Go on, now—and take the skirt with you!"

"That is Horace," commented Moore imperturbably. "You haven't any manners, Horace, have you?"

"Not a manner!" retorted the voice. "Is

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that young sport going to leave, or do I have to heave a brick at him? Scat! Get out —*you!*"

This was certainly outside my idea of a seance. It occurred to me abruptly that the voice was not proceeding from Alicia. Some confederate was concealed nearby—had entered the cabinet, perhaps, by a concealed door. Or Moore himself was ventriloquizing.

Then I realized that Alicia's eyes were again fixed on my face, and their expression was not that of a woman entranced. They were keen, bright, intelligent. Her lips moved.

"Get! Get out!" adjured that brutally vulgar voice. Then it changed to a whining, female treble: "You are young, Clayton Barbour; young and soft to the soft, cruel hand that would mold you. You are easy to mold as clay—clay—Clayton—clay! Evil hangs over you—black evil! Flee from the damned, Clayton Barbour. *Go home*—you!"

Moore was frowning uneasily.

"Sublimal," he said shortly. "Pay no attention to these voices. They emanate from the subconscious—Alicia's dream self. Similar to delirium, you know."

"Ah!" I murmured, and settled back in my chair. Not that I agreed with Moore, though I had dismissed thought of either a confederate or my host's ventriloquism. The ventriloquist was Alicia herself. I had no doubt that she could have caused the voices to sound from any quarter of the room as easily as from her own throat. As for trance, her eyes were entirely too wakeful and intelligent. Nearly everything said so far had been more repetition, in different phrases and voices, of that first brief, fierce little demand that I leave.

But by that time I was more than a trifle annoyed. It was hardly pleasant to sit in Roberta's presence and hear rude puns made on my name—to hear it implied that I was a mere nonentity with no character of my own. I rather plumed myself that Alicia would not find me so pliable. If she really wished me to depart, she had gone the wrong way about it.

"Ah," I said, settled back, and—the vulgarity of "Horace" may have been contagious—deliberately winked at Alicia. It was a crude enough act, but her methods struck me as crude, too.

A blaze of fury leaped into those too-attentive eyes. Her features writhed in such an abominable convulsion as I had never believed possible to the human countenance. Purple, distorted, terrible—with a flashing of bone-white teeth—and out of it all a voice discordant, and different from any we had heard.

"Fool—fool—fool!" it grated. "Protect—try —can't protect fool! Slipping—it's got me—I'm slip— Oh-h-h! Oh-h-h-h!"

EVEN Moore seemed affected this time. We were all on our feet, and he was beside his wife in three long strides. As the last, long-drawn moan died away, however, the dreadful purple subsided from Alicia's countenance as quickly as it had risen. She was again the queer, white porcelain doll, leaning back with closed lids in her imprisoning chair.

Moore straightened, wiped his forehead, and laughed shakily.

"Do you know," he said, "with all the experience I've had, Alicia still gives me an occasional fright? But I never saw her pass into the second stage quite so violently."

"Don't these horrible convulsions hurt your wife, Mr. Moore?"

Roberta was deeply distressed, and no wonder! I felt as if I had brought her to watch the seizures of an epilept.

"She says they don't," replied Moore. "But —never mind that. Listen!"

Alicia's lips writhed whitely. "Light!" came her barely audible whisper.

Promptly Moore reached for a switch. Two of the three lights burning went out. The third was a shaded library lamp on a table not far off. I expected him to extinguish that also, for everything in the room was plainly visible, but he let it be.

"You may hold Alicia's hands, if you wish," he offered generously.

We shook our heads. Presently the hushed whisper was heard again.

"Many shadows are here tonight," it said. "Shadows living and dead. They crowd close. An old, old shadow comes. Blood runs from his lean, gnarled throat. He speaks!"

The whisper became a ghastly, bubbling attempt at articulation. There were no words. The result was just an abominable sound.

"Man with his throat cut might speak like that," observed Moore reflectively. "She must mean old Jenkins, who was murdered next door. That's the reason we have this

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house, you know. The other half's supposed to be haunted—and is."

Now I wanted to get out in earnest. Fraud or epilept, Alicia was entirely too horrible, and Moore, with his calmness, almost worse. I tried to draw Roberta toward the door, but she held back.

"Not yet, Clay. I wish to see what will happen."

Now the horrid gurgle had merged into a man's voice. It was loud and distinct as "Horace's," but otherwise slightly different—as different, say, as tenor from high baritone.

"I am Jason Gibbs," it asserted. "Mr. Moore, will you kindly ask your friends to step back a little? We will do what we can for you, but my fellow spirits are a trifle shy of strangers."

Moore motioned us back. At the same time he shook his head smilingly.

"That's not Jason," he murmured. "A very good imitation, but an imitation, nonetheless. We shan't get much tonight."

"And in that," retorted the tenor, "you are exactly mistaken! You will get much. In fact you are likely to get more than one of you ever bargained for. You say I'm not Jason Gibbs? Seeing is believing, isn't it? Shall I show myself?"

Moore acquiesced smoothly. "Do so, by all means."

"I'll attend to that in a little while. I can read your mind all right, Jimmy Moore! You think I'm Horace talking high. Well, Horace is a very good fellow, and fond of his joke, but I'm Jason Gibbs tonight—and all the time, of course! Like to see something pretty?"

"Anything at all, Hor— Pardon me— Jason!"

"Then watch the cabinet."

We did. For a minute or two nothing happened.

Then Roberta cried out: "It's on fire!"

"No," said Moore. "Watch!"

A strange, tiny flame was running along the edge of the black curtains where they touched the floor.

When I say "running along," I do not mean that in the usual sense as applied to fire. It was a tiny, individual flame, violet in color, about an inch and a half high, and as it moved it twirled and spun on its own base in the oddest manner. Reaching the center, where the curtains joined, it floated slowly upward, still twirling, left the cabinet and presently disappeared, apparently through the ceiling. Another flame and another followed it.

I ASSURED myself that we were watching a very clever and unusual exhibition of fireworks. But I didn't believe that. I didn't know exactly what I believed, but I did know that those twirling, violet flames were the first really strange thing I had ever seen in my life. When seven of them had appeared and vanished, Moore spoke.

"Isn't that enough—er—Jason? Can't you do better than that for us?"

There was silence, while the eighth and last flame twirled upward and vanished. Then that great, rough laugh burst startlingly from Alicia's lips.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha! Oh, Jimmy Moore, I should say I can do better! I should say so!"

And with that the curtains parted suddenly and—it is hard to tell, but it was harder to stand the shock of it—a huge, misshapen, *grayish-black hand* darted out from between them.

Behind it I caught a glimpse of wrist—I couldn't see any arm. It just leaped out and into existence, as one might say, and to my unspeakable h o r r o r laid its gross, gnarled fingers fairly across Roberta Whitingfield's mouth and chin.

I believed it had seized her throat. Half mad with shock, I sprang at the hand, gripping it in both of mine. I felt a kind of cold roughness in my grasp—a rough solidity that melted to nothing even as I touched it. My hands were empty. I caught Roberta, as she swayed backward, whiter than Alicia herself.

And Moore was reproving—something, in the most everyday manner.

"Really, Horace, that wasn't a nice joke at all!" he criticized.

Easing Roberta into a chair, I sprang savagely at the curtains and swept them aside. Behind there was only the table and what we had seen on it. I had a fleeting impression that the lump of putty was different—that, where it had been a formless lump, it appeared now as if it had been squeezed between giant fingers. Then Moore was pulling me back.

"Don't do that, Barbour. We sha'n't get anything more, if you interfere like that."

"Devil!" it was all I could think of to call him, and it seemed inadequate enough.

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"You—devil! To play a trick like that on an unsuspecting girl! Bert, darling, come, I'll take you home; then I'll come back and settle with these people!"

"Barbour, I give you my word of honor that I had nothing to do with what just occurred. You brought Miss Whitingfield here of your own volition, and pardon me—against my wishes. But she assured me she was not of the nervous type—"

"Nervous!" I repeated scornfully. "A really nervous woman would have died when that black paw flew out at her!"

"I'm not hurt, Clayton," intervened Roberta. "Don't quarrel with him—please!"

"You are sensible," approved Moore. "There is no danger from such manifestations as that hand. Why, I have taken a peep into the cabinet when the power was strong and seen half a dozen human limbs and parts of limbs lying about—fragmentary impulses, as one might say, of the mediumistic force—"

But here, with marked decision, Roberta rose.

"I think we will go home, Clay. I have just discovered that I am of the nervous, screaming sort! Mr. Moore, will you please say good night for us to Mrs. Moore when she—when she wakens?"

He sighed disappointedly.

"It's too bad, really! If Jason Gibbs had actually been in control tonight there would have been nothing to shock you. Horace is nothing. Just a secondary, practical-joking phase of Alicia's own personality."

"Come, Roberta." We started toward the door.

And then, without a warning flicker, the library lamp went out, leaving the room in impenetrable darkness.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIFTH PRESENCE

THE difference between light and the lack of it is the difference between freedom and captivity, and the real reason that we pity a blind man is because he is a prisoner. This is true under normal conditions. Add to darkness dread of the supernatural, and the inevitable sum is panic.

Till that moment I doubt if Roberta or I had believed the black hand which touched her to be of other than natural origin. Ingrained thought-habit had accused Moore of trickery, even while it condemned the trick as unpleasant.

That was while the light burned. One instant later we were trapped prisoners of the dark, and instincts centuries old flung off thought-habit like a tissue cloak.

What had been a quiet, modern room became, in that instant, the devil-haunted jungle of forebears infinitely remote.

And it didn't help matters that just then "Horace" elected to be heard again. Alicia visible, Horace had seemed a vocal feat on her part. Alicia unseen, Horace became a discarnate fiend. That he was a fiend, vulgar and incongruous, only made his fiendishness more intolerable.

"How's this for a joke?" he inquired sardonically. "I never did like that lamp! Let's give it away, Jimmy. Tell your young fool friend to take the lamp away with him."

Soundlessly, without warning, something hard and slightly warm touched my cheek. I struck out wildly. My fist crashed through glass, there was a great smash and clatter from the floor, and mingled with it shout upon shout of fairly maniacal mirth. Then Moore's voice, cool but irritated:

"You'll have to stop these tricks, Horace. I'm ashamed of you! Breaking a valuable lamp like that. Our guests will believe you a common spirit of poltergeist!"

"Moore, if you don't throw on the lights, I'll kill you for this!"

My own voice shook with mingled rage and dread. Of course, it might be he who had brought the lamp and held it against my face, but the very senselessness of the trick made it terrible in a queer, unhuman way.

"Stand still!" he commanded sharply. "Barbour, Miss Whitingfield, you are not children! Nothing will harm you, if you keep quiet. It was your own yielding to anger and fear that brought this crude force into play. Did it actually hit you with the lamp, Barbour?"

"I hit the lamp, but—"

"Exactly! Now keep quiet. Horace, may I turn on the lights?"

"If you do, you'll be sorry, Jimmy! Call me poltergeist or plain Dutch, there's somebody worse than me here tonight."

"What do you mean, Horace?"

"Oh, somebody that came along in with your scared young friends. He's a joker, too, but I don't like him. He wants to get through the gates altogether, and stay through. If he

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does, a lot of people will be sorry. You say I'm rough, but say, Jimmy, this fellow is worse than rough. He's smooth! Get me? Too smooth. I'm keeping him back, and you know I'm stronger in the dark."

"Very well." I heard Moore laugh amusedly. His quiet matter-of-courseness should have deleted all terror from the affair. He was carrying on a conversation with a rather silly, rather vulgar man, of whom he was not afraid, but whose vagaries he indulged for reasons of expediency. That was the sound of it.

But the *sense* of it—there in the blackness—was such an indescribable horror to me as I cannot convey by words. There was more to this feeling than fear of Horace. I learned what nerves meant that night. If mine had all been on the outside of my skin, crawling, expectant of shock, I could have suffered no more keenly. Coward? Wait to judge that till you learn what the uncomprehending expectancy meant for me.

"Very well," laughed Moore. "But don't break any more lamps, Horace—please! Have some consideration for my pocketbook."

"Money! We haven't any pants-pockets my side of the line," Horace chuckled. "If I'm to keep the smooth fellow back, you must let me use my strength. Let me have my fun, Jimmy! What's a lamp or so between pals? And just to keep things interesting, *suppose we bring out the big fellow in the closet?*"

I heard a thud from the direction of the cabinet, a low chuckle, and then a huge panting sound. It sounded like an enormous animal. We had a sense of something living and enormous that had suddenly come out of nothing into the room.

"The hand!" screamed Roberta sharply. "It's the black-hand thing!"

I was hideously afraid that she was right. With her own clutching little hands on my arm, I sprang, dragging her with me. I didn't spring for where I thought Moore was, nor for where I supposed the door might be. There were only two thoughts in my head. One of a monstrous and wholly imaginary black giant; the other, a passionate desire for light.

By pure chance I brought up against the wall just beside a brass plate inset with two magical, blessed buttons. My fingers found them. Got the wrong button—the right one.

Flash! And we were out of demon-land and in a commonplace room again.

Not quite commonplace, though. True, no black, impossible giant inhabited it. The vast panting sound had passed, and though the lamp lay among the splinters of its wrecked shade and my hand was bleeding, a broken lamp and cut hand are possible incidentals of the ordinary.

But that woman in the chair was not!

Writhing, shrieking, foaming creatures like that have their place in a hospital—or a sick man's delirium—but not rightfully in an evening's entertainment for two unexpectant young people. Bert took one look and buried her face against my vest in an ecstasy of fear.

MOORE was beside his wife, swiftly unclasping the steel manacles that held her, but finding time for a glaring side-glance at me which expressed white-hot and concentrated rage.

I didn't understand. Alicia's previous spasms or seizures, though less violent than this, had been bad enough. Why should Moore eye me like that, when if anyone had a right to be furious it was I?

"The lights!" moaned Bert against my vest. "You turned on the lights, and it hurt her. I've read that somewhere— Oh, Clay, why don't you do something to help her and make her stop that horrible screaming?"

Moore heard and turned again, snarling. "You get out of here, Barbour! You've done harm enough!"

"Sha'n't I—sha'n't we call a doctor?" I stammered.

He didn't answer. Released, Alicia had subsided limply, a black heap in the chair, face on knees. The gurgling shrieks had lowered to a series of long, agonizing moans. I thought she was dying, and in a confused way I felt that both Roberta and Moore blamed me.

The moans, too, had ceased. Was she dead?

Now Moore was trying to lift his wife out of the chair—and failing, for some reason. Instinctively I pushed Roberta aside and moved to help him.

And then, at last, that happened for which all the rest had been a prelude—for which my whole life had been a prelude, as I was to learn one day. There came—how can I phrase it?

It was not a darkness, for I saw. It was not a vacuum, for most certainly I—everyone of us—continued to breathe. It was like—

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you know what happens sometimes in a thunderstorm? There is a hushed moment, when it is as if a mighty, invisible being had drawn in its breath—not breath of air, but of *force*. If you live in the suburbs and have alternating current, the lights go out—as if the current had been sucked back.

Static has the upper hand of kinetic. A moment, and kinetic will rebel in a blinding, crashing river of fire from sky to earth. But till then, between earth and clouds there is a tension so terrific that it gives the awful sense of a void.

That happened in the room where we stood, though the force involved was not the physical one of electricity. There was the hushed moment, the sense of awful tension—of void—of strength sucked back like the current—

Without knowing how, I became aware that all the life in the room was suddenly, dreadfully centralizing around one of us. That one was Alicia.

I saw Moore move back from her. He had gone ghastly pale, and he waved his hands queerly. The straining sense of void which was also centralization increased. A numbness crept over me.

The invisible had drawn in its breath of pure force, and my life was undoubtedly a part of it.

There came a stirring of the black heap in the chair. Inexplicably, I felt as well as saw it. As if, standing by the wall, I was also in the chair. Roberta shivered. She was out of my sight, standing slightly behind me, but I felt that, too. No two of us were in physical contact, and yet some strange interfusion of consciousness was linking us more closely than the physical.

Again Alicia stirred. She cried out inarticulately. The centralization was around her, but not by her will. I felt a surge of resentment that was not mine, but Alicia's. Then I knew that there were more than four of us present, in the room. A fifth was here—invisible, strong, unifying the strength of us all for its own purpose—for a leap across the intangible barriers and into the living world—

Numbness was on me, cold dread, and a sense of some danger peculiarly personal to myself. It was coming—now—now—

With another cry, Alicia shot suddenly erect. Her arms went out in a wide sweep that seemed to be struggling in an attempt to push something from her.

"Serapion!" she cried, and: "You! Back! Go back—go back—go back— Oh, *you, Serapion!*"

When kinetic revolts against static, blinding fire results. The tension in that room *let go* as suddenly as the lightning stroke, though I was the only one to feel it fully.

My body reeled against the wall. My spirit—I—the ego—reeled with it—beyond it—down—down—into darkness absolute—and into a nullity deeper than darkness's self.

SPEED. In outer space there is room for it, and necessity. Between our sun and the nearest star where one may grow warm again there is space that a light ray needs centuries to cross.

The cold is cruel, and a wind blows there more biting than the winds of earth. Little, cold stars rush by like far-separated lamps on a country road, and double meteors, twin blazing eyes, swing down through the long black reaches. It is hard to avoid these, when they sweep so close, and one's hands are numb on the steering-wheel.

But one can't slow for that—nor even for a frightened voice at one's elbow, pleading, protesting, begging for the slowness that will let the cold overtake and annihilate us.

"The cold!" I shouted against the wind. "Cold!"

"Well, if you're cold," wailed the harassed voice, "why don't you slow down? Clay! Clayton Barbour! I'll never ride again in a car with you, Clayton, if you don't slow down!"

Another pair of twin meteors rushed curving toward us. We avoided them, kept our course by the fraction of a safe margin, and as we did so the limitless vistas of interstellar space seemed to close in sharply and solidify.

Infinite shrank to finite with the jolt of a collision—and it was almost a real one. I swung to the left and barely avoided the tail of a farmer's wagon, ambling sedately along the road ahead of us. Then I not only slowed, but stopped, while the wagon creaked prosaically by. I sat at the wheel of a car—my own car—and that was Roberta Whitingfield beside me.

"Sixty miles an hour!" she was saying indignantly. "You haven't touched the horn once, and you are sitting so that I can't get at it."

I said nothing. Desperately I was trying to adjust the unadjustable.

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This road was real. The numbness and chill were passing, and the air of a summer night blew warm on my cheek. That wild rush of the spirit through space was already fading into place as a dream memory.

But there had been some kind of an hiatus in realities. My last definite memory was of—Alicia Moore. Alicia—upright—rebellious—crying out a name.

"Serapion."

"Clay!" A note of concern had replaced Roberta's indignation. "Why do you sit there so still? Answer me! Are you ill? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

That was a lie, of course, but instinctive as self-protection. I must get straight somehow, but I wouldn't confide the need even to Roberta. In the most ordinary tone I apologized for my reckless driving and started the car again. We were on a familiar road, outside the city, but one that would take us by roundabout ways to our home in the suburbs.

I drove slowly, for it was very necessary that Roberta s h o u l d talk. By listening I might be able to get straight without betraying myself, and indeed, before we reached home, I had a fairly clear idea of what had happened in the blank interim.

A first wild surmise that the Moore episode had been a dream in its entirety was banished almost at once. As nearly as I could gather, without direct questioning, from the time when I reeled back against the wall until my return to self-consciousness some sixty minutes later, I had behaved so normally in outward appearance that not even Roberta had seen a difference.

My body had evidently not fallen to the floor, nor showed any signs of fainting or unconsciousness. Alicia seemed to have returned to her senses at the same time that I lost mine, for Roberta spoke of her hostess's quiet air of indifference that amounted almost to scorn for the concern that we—Bert and *I*, mind you!—expressed for her.

Moore, for his part, it seemed, had recovered his temper and been rather apologetic and anxious that I, at least, should repeat my visit. I had been non-committal on the subject—for which Roberta now commended me—and then we had come away together.

After that, the hallucination I had suffered, of myself as a disembodied entity, careering from one planetary system to another, had synchronized with an actual career in the car where road-lamps simulated stars and occasional cars traveling in the opposite direction provided the stimuli for my dream-meteors.

A man hypnotized might have done what I did, and as successfully. To myself, then, I said that I had been hypnotized. That in a manner yet to be explained either Moore or his wife had hypnotized me and allowed me to leave their house under that influence. I tried to determine what reckoning I should have with them later. But it was a failure. I was frankly scared.

An hour had been jerked bodily out of my conscious life. If, in the ordinary and orthodox manner, I had lain insensible through that hour, it wouldn't have mattered so much. Instead of that, an I that was not I appeared to have taken charge of my affairs and in such a manner that a person very near and dear to me had perceived nothing wrong. It was that which frightened me.

AS THE last traces of daze and shock released my mind, the instinct to keep its lapse a secret only grew stronger. Fortunately I found concealment easy. Speeding was not so far from my occasional habit that Roberta had thought much of that part of the episode. Her vigorous protests had been largely on account of my failure to use the horn.

Dropping the subject with her usual quick good-nature, she talked of our remarkable first experience with a "real medium," and disclosed the fact—not surprising, perhaps—that she had been considerably less impressed than I. In retrospect she blamed her own nerves for most of the excitement.

"I may be unfair, Clay," she confided, "but truly, I can't help believing that Mrs. Moore is just a clever, hysterical woman who has deluded poor Mr. Moore into a faith in 'spirit voices.'"

"The black hand? The little flames?"

"Did we really see them? Don't you think the woman may have some kind of hypnotic power, like—oh, like the mango trick that everybody's heard they do in India? You know. A tree grows right up out of the ground while you watch; but it doesn't, really, of course. You're hypnotized, and only think you see it. Couldn't everything

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we saw and heard tonight have been a—a kind of hypnotic trick? And—now, with all the screaming and fuss she had made, Mrs. Moore was so calm and cool when we left! I think it was all put on, and the rest was hypnotism."

"You're a very clever little girl, Bobby," I commended, and meant it. If there was one thing I wished to believe, it was that Alicia Moore had faked.

We knew nearly as little about hypnotism as we did of psychic phenomena, real or so-called. But the word had a good sound to me. I had been hypnotized. Hypnotized! That Fifth Presence in the room had existed only in my own overborne imagination. The whole affair was—

"Berty," I said, "we've been through a highly unpleasant experience, and it's my fault. Nils warned me against those people, but I was stubborn mule enough to believe I wished to know more of them. I don't, and we don't—you and I. The truth is, Berty, I feel pretty foolish over the whole business. Had no right to take you to such a place. Downright dangerous—queer, irresponsible people like that! Say, d'you mind not telling Cathy, for instance?"

"If you won't tell mother!"

She giggled. I could picture myself relating that weird and unconventional tale to the stately Mrs. Whitingfield! Up went my right hand.

"Hear me swear! I, Clayton S. Barbour, do solemnly vow silence—"

"Full name, or it isn't legal!" trilled the girl beside me.

"Oh, very well! I, Clayton Serapion Barbour, do—"

I stopped with a tightening of the throat. As the word "Serapion" passed my lips, the Fifth Presence had shut down close about me.

Out of space—time—wrapped away in cloudy envelopes of oblivion—

"Clayton!" A clear young voice out of the clouds. They shriveled to nothing, and I was loosed to my world again. "Why, Clayton!" repeated Roberta. "How did that woman know your middle name?"

My right hand dropped to the wheel, and the car leaped forward.

"Did you tell her?" insisted Roberta.

"No," I answered shortly. "Berquist told Moore, I suppose. How do I know?"

"Someone must have told her," Bert agreed. "It isn't as if it were an ordinary name that she might have hit on by guessing."

"Oh, it isn't so unusual. There have been Ser— There have been men of that name in my mother's family for generations. I was given the name in remembrance of my mother's brother. He died only a few months before I was born, and she had cared a lot for him. But don't let's talk of the name any more. I always hated it. Sounds silly—like a girl's name—I—I— Oh, forget the name! Here we are at home, and there's your mother in the window looking for us."

"We're awfully late!"

"Tell her the Moores were very interesting people," I suggested grimly.

That night, though I slept, Alicia Moore and the Fifth Presence— in various unpleasant shapes—haunted me through some exceedingly restless hours.

CHAPTER V

THE COMING OF THE FACE

THAT a man may retire to his bed unknown and wake up famous is a truism of long standing. There is a parallel truth not half so pleasant. A man—a whole family—may retire wealthy and wake up paupers.

My father was the practically inactive senior member of his firm, and the reins had so far left his hands that when the blow fell it was hard for him to get a grasp on the situation or even credit it.

Rather shockingly, the first word we had of disaster came through the morning paper in a blare-headed column announcing the suicide of Frederic Hutchinson. Suicide without attempt at concealment. A scrubwoman, entering the private offices of Barbour & Hutchinson early that morning, had fairly trodden in the junior partner's scattered brains.

There followed a week of torment—of sordid revelations of unwise speculation, and ever increasing despair. A week that left dad a shaken, tremulous old man, and the firm of Barbour & Hutchinson, grain brokers, an unpleasant problem to be dealt with by the receivers.

Dad had known his partner for a clever man, and no doubt he was formerly a trustable one. But when the disease called speculation takes late root, its run is likely to be more virulent than in a younger victim. All Hutchinson's personal estate had been ab-

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sorbed. His family were left in worse predicament than ours—or would have been, save that dad's peculiar sense of honor caused him to throw every cent he owned, independent of the firm, into the pit where that firm's honor had vanished, in an attempt to save it.

Unfortunately he possessed not nearly enough to satisfy the creditors and re-establish the business. As my mother pointed out, the disgrace that had been all Fred Hutchinson's was now dad's for impoverishing his family when, under the terms of partnership and the law of our State, most of his personal investments and realty could have been held free from liability.

And to that dad had only one, and to my mind somewhat appalling, reply:

"Let Clay go to work in earnest, then. Perhaps some day my son will clear the slate of what scores I've failed to settle!"

Well, great God, can a young fellow carefully trained to have everything he wants without trying turn financial genius in a week?

If it hadn't been for Roberta, I think I should have thrown up the sponge and fairly run away from it all. Her faith, though, stirred a chord of ambition that those of my own blood failed to touch, and her stately Charlestonian mother emerged from stateliness into surprising sympathy.

Then Dick Vansittart, the unregenerate youngster who had been my dearest pal in college days, got me a job with the Colossus Trust Company, the bank of which his father was president and where he himself loafed about intermittently.

Even I knew that the salary offered was more commensurate with our needs than with what I was worth. Vansittart, Sr., a gruff old lion of a man, growled at me through a personal interview which ended in: "You won't earn your salt for six months, Barbour, but maybe Terne can put up with you. Try it, anyway!"

Terne was the second vice-president, whose assistant, or secretary, or general errand-boy, it was proposed that I become. I reached for my hat.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Vansittart! I would hardly care to receive pay except on the basis that it was earned."

The lion roared.

"Sit down! Don't you try Dick's high mannerisms with me! If I can tolerate Dick in this bank, I can tolerate you; but there's going to be one difference. You'll play the man and work till you do earn your wages, or you'll go out! Understand?"

"I, merely meant—"

"Never mind that." The savage countenance before me softened to a leonine benevolence. "Clayton Barbour's son wants no charity, but, you young fool, don't I know that? Your father has swamped himself to pay debts that weren't his. Now I choose to pay a debt that isn't mine, but Dick's!"

I must have looked my bewilderment.

"I mean," he thundered, "that when my son was expelled from the college he disgraced he nearly took you with him! You cubs believe you carry your shame on your own shoulders. You never think of us. I've crossed the street three times to avoid meeting your father—I! Earn your wages here, so that I can shake hands with him next time. Here—take this note to Mr. Terne. His office is next the cashier's. Go to work!"

I went, but outside the door found Van waiting for me, smiling ironically.

"You heard?" I muttered.

"Not being stone deaf, yes. The governor doesn't mind publicity where I'm concerned, eh? Interested passers-by in the street might hear, for all he cares. Oh, well—truth is mighty and must prevail! Wish you luck, Clay, and there's Fatty Terne coming now. So long!"

I was left to present my note to a dignified person who had just emerged from the cashier's office. "Fatty" was a merciless nickname for him, and unfair besides. The second vice-president's large figure suggested strength rather than overindulgence. Beneath his dignity he proved a kindly, not domineering man, much overworked himself, but patient with early mistakes from a new helper.

He shared one stenographer with another official, and seemed actually grateful when I offered to learn shorthand during spare hours in order to be of more use with the correspondence. I was quite infected with the work fever for a while, and saw little of Van, who let me severely alone from the first day I entered the bank.

His new standoffishness didn't please me exactly, but I was too busy to think much of him one way or the other. At home, however, things went not so well. Since the house had been sold over our heads, we were forced into painfully small quarters. There was a little place near by that belonged to my mother. It had stood empty for a year,

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and though not much better than a cottage, her ownership of it solved the rent problem, and, as she bitterly explained, we no longer needed servants' rooms nor space for the entertainment of guests..

Mother and Cathy undertook the housework, while dad fooled about with paint-pots and the like; trying to delude himself into the belief that paint, varnish, and a few new shelves here and there would make a real home for us out of this wretched shack; for that is what Cathy and I called it privately.

All the problems of home life had taken on new, ugly, uncomfortable angles, and I spent as little time among them as I decently could.

Roberta had no more complaints to make of "sixty miles an hour and never touched the horn." My car had gone with the rest. We went on sedate little walks, like a country pair, tried to prefer movies to grand opera, and piled up heart-breaking dream-castles for consolation.

Two months slid by, and in that while our adventure at the "dead-alive house," as Roberta had named Moore's place, was hardly mentioned between us. Once or twice, indeed, she referred to it, but there was for me an oppressive distastefulness in the subject that made me lead our conversations elsewhere.

On the very heels of the catastrophic passing of my father's firm I had received a brief note from Moore. He expressed concern and sympathy, adding in the same breath, as it were, that he hoped I had been "well enough interested the other evening to wish to walk farther along the path of psychical research."

I regarded his concern as impertinent and his hope as impudent, considering my unpleasant memories of the first visit. I tore the letter up without answering it. After that I heard no more from him, and it was not until the second month's ending that a thing occurred which forced the whole matter vividly upon my recollection.

"IF DEAR Serapion had not been taken from us," said my mother, "we should be living in a civilized manner, and my children and I would not have been driven to manual labor!"

Dad kept his eyes on his plate, refraining from answer. He had been guilty of an ill-advised criticism on Cathy's cooking, and, from that, discussion had run through all the ramifications of domestic misery until I was tempted to leave dinner unfinished and escape to my usual refuge, the Whitingfields.

But the mention of my uncle's name had a peculiar effect on me. A slight swimming sensation behind the eyes, a gripping tightness at the back of my neck—*Serapion!*

The feeling passed, but left me trembling so that I remained in my place, fearing to rise lest I betray myself. As before, some deep-seated instinct fought that. The weakness was like a shameful wound, to be at all costs hidden.

"Had he lived," continued my mother, "he would have seen to it that we weren't brought to this. No one near poor Serapion was ever allowed to be uncomfortable!"

Dad's eyes flashed up with a glint of spirit that he had never before showed in this connection.

"Is that so? I know he kept remarkably comfortable himself, but I can't recall his feathering anyone's nest but his own."

"Don't slander the dead!" came her sharp retort. "Why, you owe the very house over your head to him! And if it hadn't been that his thoughtfulness left it in my name you wouldn't have that. You would have robbed your children and me of even this pitiful shelter—"

"Evelyn—please!"

"It's true! And then you dare cast slurs and innuendos at poor Serapion—"

"I gave him the house in the first place," dad muttered.

She rose, eyes flashing and filled with tears. "Yes, you did! And this shameful little hole was all he had to live in—and die in! Serapion was a saint!" she declared. "A saint! He was—he was universally *loved!*"

And with that, my mother swept from the room. Cathy followed, though with a sneaking glance of sympathy for dad. Tempestuous exits on mother's part had been frequent as far back as I could remember, and as they were invariably followed by hours in which someone must sit with her and the house must be kept dead silent, we other three had the fellow-feeling of victims.

Dad eyed me across the table. "Son," he said, "what is your middle name?"

"Ser—Ser—Samuel!" I ended desperately. My heart, for no obvious reason, had begun a furious palpitation. Why couldn't they let that name alone?

He looked surprised, and then laughed.

"You are right, son! I was about to give

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you warning—to forbid your becoming such a saint as your esteemed namesake. But I guess that isn't needed. The Samuels of the world stand on their own feet, as you do now, thank Heaven! A Samuel for the Serapion in you, then, and never forget it!"

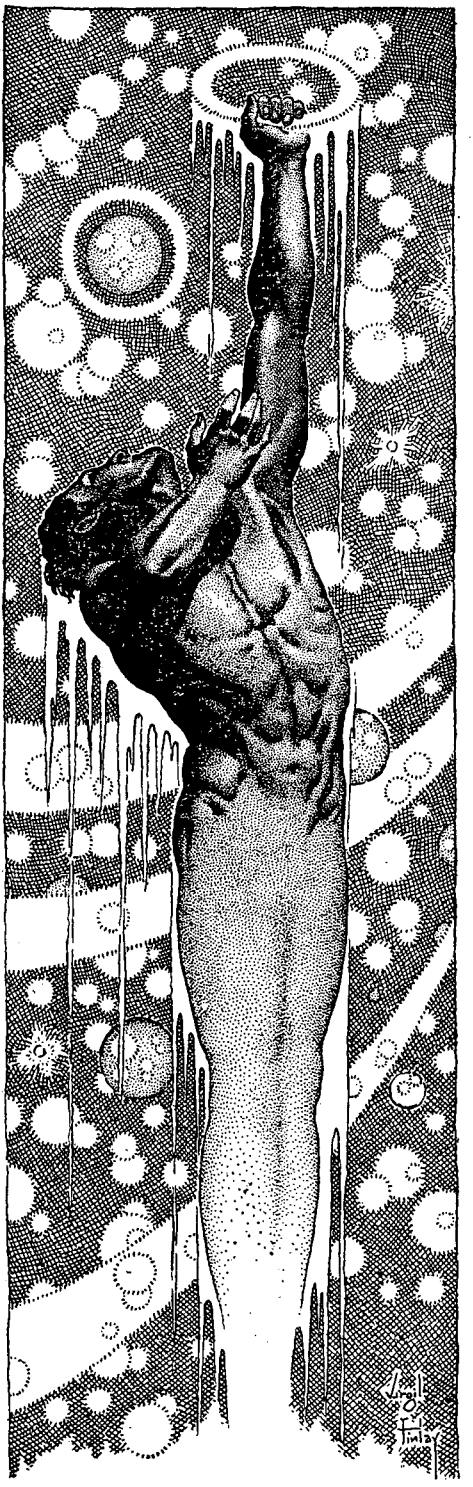
He could not guess the frantic struggle going on beneath my calm exterior. There is, I believe, a psychopathic condition in which sound-waves produce visual sensations; a musical note, for example, being seen as a blob of scarlet, or the sustained blast of a bugle as a ribbony, orange-colored streak. Some such confusion of the senses seemed to have occurred in me, only in my case one single sound produced it, and the result was not color but a feeling of pressure, dizziness, suffocation.

Fighting for control, I knew that another iteration of the sound in question would cost me the battle. Dad's mouth opened, and simultaneously I rose. Opinions on my uncle's character, pro or con, didn't interest me half so much as the problem of excusing myself in a steady voice, walking from table to doorway without a stagger, and finally escaping from that room before the fatal name could be spoken again.

These feats accomplished, I managed to get up the stairs and into my own room, where I locked the door and dropped, face downward, across the bed. Though the evening was cool, my whole body was drenched with sweat and my brain reeled sickeningly.

ONE may get help from queer sources. Van, in our gay junior year—his last at college—had initiated me into a device for keeping steady when the last drink has been one too many. You mentally recite a poem or speech or the multiplication table—any old thing will do. Fixing the mind in that way seems to soothe the gyrating interior and enables a fellow at least to fall asleep like a gentleman.

In my present distress that came back to me. Still fighting off the unknown with one-half of my mind, I scrabbled around in the



"Speed. . . . In outer space there is room for it, and necessity. Between our sun and the nearest star where one may grow warm again there is space that a light ray needs centuries to cross. The cold is cruel and a wind blows there more biting than the winds of earth"

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other half for some definite memorization to take hold of.

There was none. The very multiplication table swam a jumble of numbers. Then I caught a rhyme beginning in the back of my head, and fixed my attention on it feverishly. Over and over the words said themselves, first haltingly, then with increasing certainty. It was a simple, jingling little prayer that every child in the English-speaking world, I suppose, has learned past forgetfulness. "Now I lay me down to sleep—"

Again—again—by the tenth repetition of "I pray the Lord my soul to take," I had wrenched my mind away from—that other—and had its whole attention on the rhyme. At last, following a paroxysm of trembling, I knew myself the victor. Once more the Fifth Presence had released me.

Panting and weak from reaction, I sat up. What ailed me? How, in reason and common sense, could the sound of any man's name have this effect on me?

Hypnotism? Nearly two months had elapsed since my first trouble of this kind, and without recurrence in the interim. No, and come to think of it, I couldn't recall having heard the name spoken in that while, either. Serapion! It was only when uttered aloud that the word had power over me. I could think of it without any evil effect. And that name on Alicia's lips had been my last vivid impression before I lost self-consciousness and walked out of Moore's house, an intelligent automaton for sixty minutes after.

Scraps of psychology came back to me. Hypnotism—hypnotic suggestion. Could a man be shocked into hynotic sleep, awaken, and weeks later be swayed by a sound that had accompanied the first lapse?

One way, I set myself very firmly. In cool judgment I was no believer in ghosts. The very thought brought a smile to my lips. My uncle had died before I was born; but, though dad had for some reason disliked him, by all accounts my namesake had been a genial, easy-going, agreeable gentleman, rather characterless, perhaps, and inclined to let the other fellow work, but not a man whose spirit could be imagined as a half-way efficient "haunt."

Serapion! No, and neither would he probably have flung away his own and his family's comfort for a point of fine-drawn honor. Was dad in the right? I had tried to reserve criticism there, and in action I had certainly backed him to the limit. Inevitably, though from yet far-off, I could see the loss of Roberta grinding down upon me. She couldn't wait my convenience forever, you know. Some other fellow—some free, unburdened chap—

I buried my head in my hands.

Then I dropped them and sprang erect, every nerve alert.

I had closed my eyes, and in that instant, *a face had leaped into being behind their shut lids.* The face was not Roberta's, though I had been thinking of her. Moreover, it had lacked any dreamlike quality. It had come real—real as if the man had entered my bedroom and thrust his face close to mine.

As my eyes flicked open, it had vanished, leaving me quivering with a strange resentment—an anger, as if some intimate privacy had been invaded. I stood with clenched fists, more angry than amazed at first, but not daring to shut my eyes lest it return.

What had there been about the queer vision that was so loathsome?

The face of a man around forty years it had seemed, smooth-shaven, boyish in a manner, with a little inward twist at the mouth corners, an amused slyness to the clear, light-blue eyes. The face of an easy-going, take-life's-jokes-as-they-come sort of fellow, amiable, pleasant, and, in some indefinite fashion—horrible.

I was sure I had never seen the man in real life, though there had been a vague familiarity about him, too.

About *him!* A dream—a vision.

"Clayton Barbour," I muttered through shut teeth, "if it has reached the point where a word throws you into spasm and you are afraid to close your eyes, you'd better consult a doctor; and that is exactly what I shall do!"

CHAPTER VI

THE FACE SPEAKS

NILS BERQUIST has his own ways, and whether or not they were practical or customary to mankind at large influenced him in no degree. He called himself a socialist, but in pure fact he was simply one of those persons who require a cause to fight for and argue about, as a Hedonist craves his pleasures, or the average man an income.

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Real socialism, with the communal interests it implies, was foreign to Berquist's very nature. He could get along, in a withdrawn kind of way, with almost anyone. He would share what small possessions he had with literally anyone. But his interest went to such abstractions of thought as were talked and written by men of his own kind, while himself—his mind—he kept for the very few. Those are the qualities of an aristocrat, not a socialist.

One result of his paradoxical attitude showed in the fact that when it came to current news, Nils was as ignorant a man as you could meet in a day's walk. My various troubles and activities had kept me from thinking of him, but when I again happened on Nils in town one evening it hurt my feelings to discover that the spectacular downfall of Barbour & Hutchinson might have occurred on another planet, so far as he was concerned.

News that had been blazoned in every paper was news to him all this time afterward. Even learning it from me in person, he said little, though this silence might have been caused by embarrassment. Roberta was with me, and to tie Nils's tongue you had only to lead him into the presence of femininity in the person of a young, pretty girl.

I at last recalled the fact, and because for a certain reason I wished a chance to talk with him where he would talk, I asked if he couldn't run out some night and have dinner with us. Cathy's cooking was nothing wonderful, but I knew Nils wouldn't mind that, nor the cramped quarters we had to live in. I reckoned on taking him up to my own room later for a private confab.

After a short hesitation he accepted.

"You take care of yourself, Clay," he added. "You're looking pale—run down. Don't tell me you've been laid up sick along with all this other trouble?"

"No, indeed, old man. Working rather harder than I used to and—lately I haven't slept very well. Bad dreams—but aside from that, nothing serious.

After a few more words, we parted, he striding off on his lonely way to some bourne unknown; Roberta and I proceeding toward the movies.

A fortnight had passed since the strange face had made its first appearance. If Nils thought I looked pale, there was reason for it. "Bad dreams," I had told him, but bad dreams were less than all.

My resolve to visit a doctor had come to nothing. I had called, indeed, upon our family physician, as I had meant. The moment I entered his presence, however, that instinct for concealment which had prevented me from confiding in Roberta or my family rose up full strength. The symptoms I actually laid before Dr. Lloyd produced a smile and a prescription that might as well have been the traditional bread pills—I didn't bother to have it filled. I went out as alone with my secret as when I entered.

A face—boyish in manner, pleasant, half-smiling usually; with an amused slyness to the clear, light-blue eyes; an agreeable inward quirk at the corners of the finely cut lips. I had come to know every lineament intimately well.

It had not returned again until some time after the first appearance. Then—at the bank, the afternoon following my futile conference with Dr. Lloyd—I happened to close my eyes, and *it* was there, behind the lids.

There was a table in Mr. Terne's office, over which he used to spread out his correspondence and papers. I was seated at one side of the table and he on the other, and I started so violently that he dropped his pen and made a straggling ink-feather across the schedule of securities he was verifying.

He patiently blotted it, and I made such a fuss over getting out the ink-eradicator and restoring the sheet of minutely figured ledger-paper to neatness, that he forgot to ask what had made me jump in the first place.

After that the face was with me so often that if I shut my eyes and saw nothing, its absence bothered me. I would feel then that the face had got behind me, perhaps, and acquired the bad habit of casting furtive glances over my shoulder.

You may think that if one must be burdened with a companion invisible to the world, such a good-humored countenance as I have described would be the least disagreeable. But that was not so.

There was to me a subtle hatefulness about it—like a thing beautiful and at the same time vile, which one hates in fear of coming to love it.

I never called the face "him," never thought of it as a man, nor gave it a man's name. I was afraid to! As if recognition

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would lend the vision power, I called it the Fifth Presence, and hated it.

AS DAYS of this passed, there came a time when the face began trying to talk to me. There, at least, I had the advantage. Though I could see the lips move, forming words, by merely opening my eyes I was able to banish it, and so avoid learning what it wished to say.

In bed, I used to lie with my eyes wide open sometimes, for hours, waiting for sleep to come suddenly. When that happened I was safe, for though my dreams were often bad, the face never invaded them.

I discovered, too, that the name Serapion had in a measure lost power to throw me off balance, since the face had come. My mother continued to harp on the superiority of my dead uncle's character, and how he would have shielded us from the evils that had befallen, until dad acquiesced in sheer self-protection. But though I didn't like to hear her talk of him, and though the sound of the name invariably quickened my heartbeat, hearing neither increased nor diminished the vision's vividness.

It was with me, however, through most of my waking hours—waiting behind my lids—and if I looked pale, as Nils said, the wonder is that I was able to appear at all as usual. So I wished to talk with Nils, hoping that to the man who had warned me against the Moores I could force myself to confide the distressing aftermath of my visit at the "dead-alive house."

He had promised to come out the next night but one, which was Wednesday. Unfortunately, however, I missed seeing him then, after all, and because of an incident whose climax was to give the Fifth Presence a new and unexpected significance.

About two-thirty Wednesday afternoon I ran up the steps of the Colossus Trust, and at the top collided squarely with Van, Jr. By the slight reel with which he staggered against a pillar and caught hold of it, I knew that Van had been hitting the high spots again and hoped he had not been interviewing his father in that condition. On recovering his balance, Van stood up steady enough.

"Old scout Clay! Say, you look like a pale, pallid, piffling fresh-water clam, you do. 'Pon my word, I'm ashamed of the old Colossus. The old brass idol had sucked all the blood out of you. My fault, servin' up the best friend I ever had as a—a helpless sacrifice to my father's old brass Colossus. Come on with me—you been good too long!"

He playfully pretended to tear off the brass-lettered name of the trust company, which adorned the wall beside him, cast it down and trample on it. When I tried to pass he caught my arm. "Come on!"

"Can't," I explained quietly. "Mr. Terne was the best man at a wedding today, but he left me a stack of work."

Van sniffed. "Huh! I know that wedding. I was invited to that wedding, but I wouldn't go. Measly old teetotaler wedding! Just suits Fatty Terne. When you get married, Clay, I'll send along about eleven magnums for a wedding present, and then I'll come to *your* wedding!"

"You may—when it happens." Again I tried to pass him.

"Wait a minute. You poor, pallid workslave—you know what I'm going to do for you?"

"Get me fired, by present prospects. I must—"

"You must not. Just listen. You know Barney Finn?"

"Not personally. Let me go now, Van and I'll see you later."

"Barney Finn," he persisted doggedly, "has got just the biggest li'l engine that ever slid round a track. Now you wait a minute. Barney's another friend of mine. Told me all about it. Showed it to me. Showed me how it's going to make every other wagon at Fairview tomorrow look like a hand-pushed per—perambulator!"

"All right. Come around after the race and tell me how Finn made out. Please—"

"Wait. You're my friend, Clay, and I like you. You put a thousand bones on Finney's car, and say goodby to old Colossus."

I laughed. But he went on.

"My dear friend, you misjudge me, sadly—yes, indeed! Didn't I wrest one pitiful century from Colossus five minutes ago, and isn't that the last that sood between me an' starvation, and ain't I going right out an' plaster that century on Finn's car? Would I im-impoverish the Colossus and me, puttin' that last century on anything but a sure win? Come across, boy!"

Now, one might think that Van's invitation lacked attractiveness to a sober man. I happened to know, however, that drunk or sober, his judgment was good on one

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subject, the same being motor-cars. Barney Finn, moreover, was a speed-track veteran with a mighty reputation at his back. He had, in the previous year, met several defeats, due to bad luck, in my opinion, but they had brought up the odds. If he had something particularly good and new in his car for tomorrow's race at Fairview, there was a chance for somebody to make a killing, as Van said. "What odds?" I queried.

"For each li'l bone you plant, twelve li'l bones will blossom. Good enough? I could get better, but this will be off Jackie Rosenblatt, an' you know that he's a reg'lar old Colossus his own self. Solid an' square. Hock his old high silk hat before he'd welch."

"Yes, Rosie's square." I did some quick mental figuring, and then pulled a thin sheaf of bills from an inner coat pocket. Instantly, Van had snatched them out of my hand.

"Not all!" I exclaimed sharply. "Take fifty, but I brought that to deposit—"

"Deposit it with Jackie! Why, you old miser with your bank account! Four entire centuries, and you weepin' over poverty! Say, Clay, how much is twelve times four?"

"Forty-eight, but—"

"Lightnin' calculator!" he admired. "Say, doesn't forty-eight hundred make a bigger noise in your delikite ear than four measly centuries? Come across!"

I don't think I nodded. I am almost sure that I had begun reaching my hand to take all, or most of those bills back. But Van thought otherwise. "Right, boy!"

With plunging abruptness he was off down the steps. I hesitated. Forty-four hundred. Then I caught myself and was after him, but too late. His speedy gray roadster was already nosing recklessly into the traffic. Before I reached the bottom step it had shot around the corner and was gone.

OFF Mr. Terne's spacious office there was a little glass-enclosed, six-by-eight cubby-hole which I called my own.

Ten o'clock Thursday morning found me seated in the one chair, staring at a pile of canceled notes on the desk before me. I had started to check them half an hour ago, but so far just one checkmark showed on the list beside them. I had something worse to think of than canceled notes.

As I sat, I could hear Mr. Terne fussing about the outer office. Then I heard him go out. About two minutes afterward the door banged open so forcibly that I half started up, conscience clamoring.

But it wasn't the second vice returning in a rage. It was Van. He fairly bolted into my cubby-hole, closed the door, pitched his hat in a corner, and swung himself to a seat on my desk-edge, scattering canceled notes right and left. There he sat, hands clasped, staring at me in a perfect stillness which contrasted dramatically with his violent entry. His eyes looked dark and sunken in a strained, white face. My nerves were inappreciative of drama.

"Where were you last night?" I demanded irritably. "I hunted for you around town till nearly midnight."

"What? Oh, I was way out in—I don't know exactly. Some dinky road-house. I pretty nearly missed the race and—and I wish to Heaven I had, Clay!" He passed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"Did Finn lose?" I snapped. "But—why, the race can hardly be more than started yet!"

"Finn started!" he gulped.

"Ditched?" I gasped, a flash of inspiration warning me of what was coming.

He nodded. "Turned turtle on the second lap and—say, boy—I helped dig him out and carry him off—you know, I liked Barney. It was—bad. The mechanism broke his back clean—flung against a post—but Barney—say, what was left of him kind of—kind of came apart—when we—" He stopped short, gulped again, and: "Guess I'm in bad shape this morning," he said huskily. "Nerves all shot to pieces."

I should have imagined they would be. A man straight from an all-night debauch can't witness a racing-car accident, help handle the human wreckage afterward, and go whistling merrily to tell his friends the tale.

I expressed that, though in more kindly chosen words, and then we both were silent a minute. Barney Finn had not been my friend, or even acquaintance, and while I was vicariously touched by Van's grief and horror, my own dilemma wasn't simplified by this news. Yet I hated to fling sordidness in the face of tragedy by speaking of money.

"Afterward I didn't feel like watching the race out." As Van spoke, I heard the outer door open again. This time it really was Mr. Terne, for I recognized his step. "So I came straight here," Van continued.

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My own door opened, and a kindly, dignified figure appeared there.

"Barbour," said the second vice, "have you that—ah, good morning, Richard." He nodded rather coldly to Van, and went on to ask me for the list I was supposed to be at work on.

When I explained that the checking wasn't quite finished, he turned away; then glanced back.

"By the way, Barbour," he said, "Prang dropped me a line saying that when you were in his office yesterday he paid up four hundred he has owed me since last June. If you were too late to deposit yesterday afternoon, get it from my box and we'll put it in with this check from the United."

I felt myself going fiery-red. "Sorry," I said. "I'll let you have that money this afternoon, Mr. Terne, I—I—"

"He gave it to me to deposit for him, and I used it for something else," broke in Van with the utmost coolness.

On occasion Van's brain worked with flashlight rapidity. He had put two and two of that four hundred together while another man might have been wondering about it. Terne stared, first at Van, then at me.

"You—you gave it—" he began slowly.

"He came here for your pass-book," ran Van's glib tongue. "I dropped in on him, and as I was going out past the tellers, I offered to put it in for him. Then I stuck it in my pocket, forgot it till too late, and needing some cash last night, I used that. Barbour has been throwing fits ever since I told him. I'll get it for you this afternoon."

Terne stared some more, and Van returned the look with cool insolence.

A BRICK-REDDISH color crept up the second v.p.'s cheeks, his mouth compressed to an unfamiliar straightness, and turning suddenly he walked out of not only my cubby-hole but his own office. The door shut with a rattle of jarred glazing.

"You s h o u l d n ' t have done that!" I breathed.

"Oh, rats! Fatty Terne's gone to tell the old man. But he'll get thrown out. No news to the old man, about me, and he's sick of hearing it. Anyway, this is my fault, Clay, and I ought to stand the gaff. You've worked like the devil here, and then I come along and spoil everything. Drunken fool, me! Knew I'd queer you if we got together, and till yesterday I had sense enough to keep off. When I took those bills I knew there was something wrong, but I was too lit up to have any sense about it. Plain highway robbery! Never mind, old pal, I'll bring you back the loot this afternoon if I have to bust open one of the old Colosus's vaults for it!"

At my elbow the office phone jingled.

"Just a minute," I said. "No; wait, Van. Hello! Hel-oh, Mr. Vansittart? Yes, sir. Be over at once, sir. Yes, he's here. What? Yes—" The other receiver had clicked up.

"We're in for it," I muttered. "Apparently your father hasn't thrown Terne out!"

Vansittart, Sr., the gruff old lion, granted lax discipline to no man under his control save one; and even Van, Jr., was, if not afraid, at least a bit wary of him. Though he had taken me on in the bank at a far higher wage than my services were worth, he had also made it very clear that so far as I was concerned, favoritism ended there. For me, I was sure the truth of the present affair would mean instant discharge.

"Shut the door!" he growled as we entered. "Now, Dick, I'll thank you to explain for exactly what reason you stole Mr. Terne's four hundred."

"Stole!" Van's slim figure stiffened, and he went two shades whiter.

"Stole, yes! I said, stole. That is the usual term for appropriating money without the owner's consent."

"I don't accuse the boy of theft!" Terne's set face of anger relaxed suddenly. He didn't like Van, but he was a man who could not be unfair if he tried.

"Keep out of this, Terne—please. Dick, I am waiting."

"Well, really," Van drawled, "if you put it that way, I couldn't say what I did use the money for. There was a trifle of four hundred, owned, I believe, by Mr. Terne, which I borrowed, intending to return it in a few hours—"

"From what fund?" The old man was alert. I felt instinctively that this interview was a bit different from any that Van had been through heretofore. "Are you aware that your account in this bank is already overdrawn to the sum of—" he consulted a slip before him—"of forty-nine dollars and sixty cents? You perhaps have reserve funds at your command elsewhere?"

VAN looked his father in the eye. What he saw must have been unusual. His brows went up slightly and the same fight-

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ing look came into his face which I had seen there when he and I confronted the faculty together. On that occasion I had been genuinely inclined to meekness. I remained in college while Van was thrown out.

He laughed lightly. "Excuse me half an hour while I run out and sell the li'l old roadster. Forty-nine sixty, you said? I'll pay you yours first, dad!"

"That's kind! After stealing one man's money you propose selling another man's car to replace it. Yes, my car, I said. What have you got in this world but your worthless brains and body to call your own? Wait! We'll go into this matter of ownership more deeply in a few minutes. Barbour," he whirled on me, "you allowed funds belonging to your superior to pass into unauthorized hands. That is not done in this bank. As things stand, I shall leave your case to Mr. Terne, but first you will make one direct statement. I wish it made so that no question may arise afterward. Did you or did you not hand four hundred dollars in bills, the property of Mr. Terne, to my—to my son."

It was up to me in earnest. I was now sure beyond doubt of what Van had run against. His parent had turned at last, and even the whole truth would barely suffice to save him. My lips opened. To blame though he was in a way, Van mustn't suffer seriously in my protection. I could not forget that momentary hesitation on my part, save for which I could easily have retrieved the bills before Van was out of reach.

"I gave it to him," I began.

And then, abruptly, silently, another face flashed in between me and the president. Instead of Vansittart's dark, angry eyes, I was staring into a pair of clear, amused, light-blue ones. A finely cut mouth half smiled at me with lips that moved.

Always theretofore the face had come only when my lids were closed. Its wish to communicate with me—and that it did wish to communicate I was sure as if the thing had been a living man, following me about and perpetually tugging at my sleeve—had been a continual menace, but one which I had grown to feel secure from because the thing's power seemed so limited.

Now, with my eyes wide open, there hung the face in mid air. It was not in the least transparent. That is, its intervening presence obscured Vansittart's countenance as completely as though the head of a real man had thrust in between us. And yet—it is hard to express, but there was that about it, a kind of flatness, a lack of normal three-dimensional solidity, which gave it the look of a living portrait projected on the atmosphere.

I knew without even glancing toward them that Van and Mr. Terne did not see the thing as I did. It was there for me alone. At the moment, though I fought the belief again later, I knew beyond question that what I beheld was the projection of a powerful, external will, the same which, with Alicia's dynamic force to aid, had once actually taken possession of my body.

The finely cut lips moved. No audible sound came from them, but as they formed words, the speech was heard in my brain distinctly as if conveyed by normal sound-vibrations through the ear-drums. It was *silent* sound. The tone was deep, rather agreeable, amiably amused:

"You have said enough," the face observed pleasantly. "You have told the truth; now stop there. Your friend has a father to deal with, while you have an employer. He is willing to shoulder all the blame, and for you to expose your share in it will be a preposterous folly. Remember, that hard as you have worked, you are receiving here twice the money you are worth—three times what you can hope to begin on elsewhere. Remember the miserable consequences of your own father's needless sacrifices. Remember how often, and very justly, you have wished that he had thought less of a point of fine-drawn honor, and more of his family's happiness. Will you commit like folly?"

I can't tell, so that anyone will understand, what a wave of accumulated memories and secret revolts against fate overswept me as I stared hard into the smiling, light-blue eyes. But I fought.

Grimly I began again. "I gave it to him!" and then—stopped.

"That's enough." This time it was Vansittart speaking. "You may go, Barbour. Mr. Terne, I will ask you to leave us. You will receive my personal check for the amount you have lost."

"But – but – " I stammered desperately while those clear eyes grew more amused, more dominating.

The old man's hard-held calmness broke in a roar. "Get out! Both of you! Go!"

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Mr. Terne laid his hand on my arm, and reluctantly I allowed myself to be steered toward the door. As I turned away the face did not float around with the turning of my eyes.

It hung in mid air, save for that odd, undimensional flatness real as any of the three other faces there. When my back was to the president, the—the Fifth Presence was behind me. On glancing back, it still hung there. Then it smiled at me—a beautiful, pleased, wholly approving smile—and faded to nothing.

I went out with Mr. Terne, and left Van alone with his father.

CHAPTER VII

THE BELOVED SERAPION

ONE hour later I departed from the Colossus Trust Company with instructions not to return. Oh, no, I had not been ruthlessly discharged by the outraged vice president. The inhibition covered the balance of the day only, and, as Mr. Terne put it: "A few hours' quiet will give you a clearer view of the situation, Barbour. I honor you for feeling as you do. It was, Richard, I believe, who obtained you a position here. Just for your consolation when Mr. Vansittart has — er — cooled off somewhat, I intend making a small plea in Richard's behalf. Now, go home and come back fresh in the morning. You look as though all the cares of the world had been dumped on your shoulders. Take an older man's advice and shake off those that aren't yours, boy!"

He was a kindly, good man, the second vice president of the Colossus. But his kindliness didn't console me. In fact, I felt rather the worse for it. I went home, wishing that he had kicked me clean around the block instead of—of liking, and petting, and by inference, praising me for being such a contrast in character to poor, reckless, loose-living, heroic Van!

When I left, the latter was still in his father's office. Though I might have waited for him outside, I didn't. He was not the kind to meet me with even a glance of reproach; but just the same I did not feel eager to meet him.

I had resolved, however, that unless Van pulled through scatheless, I would myself "make a small plea in Richard's behalf," and next time not all the smooth, smiling devils from the place-that's-no-longer-believed-in should persuade me to crumple.

On the train—I commuted, of course—I deliberately shut my eyes, and waited for the vision to appear. If it could talk to me by moving its lips, there must be some way in which I could express my opinion to it. I burned to do that! Like a sneak, it had taken me unawares in a crucial moment. I had a few thoughts of the Fifth Presence which should make even that smug vision curl up and die.

I closed my eyes—and was asleep in five minutes. I was tired, you see, and, now that I wanted it, the Fifth Presence kept discreetly invisible. The conductor who knew me, called my station and me at the same time, and I blundered off the train, half awake, but thoroughly miserable.

There was no one at home but my mother. Of late dad's sight had failed till it was not safe for him to be on the street alone. As he liked to walk, however, Cathy had gone out with him.

I found mother lying down in her darkened bedroom, in the preparatory stage of a headache. Having explained that Mr. Terne had given me an unexpected half-holiday, I turned to leave her, but checked on a sudden impulse.

"Mother," I said softly, "why did you name me Ser—why was I given my uncle's name instead of just dad's?"

"What an odd question!"

Mother sat up so energetically that two cushions fell off the couch. I picked them up and tried to reestablish her comfortably, but she wouldn't have it. "Tell me at once why you asked that extraordinary question, Clay!"

I said there was nothing extraordinary about it that I could see. My uncle's name itself was extraordinary, or at least unusual, and the question happened to come into my mind just then. Besides, she had spoken a good deal of him lately. Maybe that had made me think of it.

Mother drew a deep breath.

"He told me—can you believe this?—he told me that some day you would ask that question! This is too wonderful! And I've seemed to feel a protecting influence about us—this house that was his—and your good position at the bank!"

"Mother, will you kindly explain what you are talking about?"

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My heart had begun a muffled throbbing.

"Be patient! I have a wonderful story to tell you. I've doubted, and hoped, and dared say nothing, but, Clayton, dear, in these last miserable weeks I have felt his presence like the overshadowing wings of a protecting angel. If it is true—if it only could be true—"

"Mother—please!"

"Sit down, dear. . . . Your father never liked dear Serapion, and—why, how wonderful this all is! Your coming home early, I mean, and asking me the question just at the one time when your father, who disliked him, is away, and we have the whole house—his house!—to ourselves. Can't you feel his influence in that, dear?"

"What have you to tell me, mother?"

"I shall begin at the very first—"

"If you make the story too long," I objected craftily, "dad and Cathy will be back."

"That is true. Then I'll just tell the part he particularly wished you to know. Dear Serapion was universally loved, and I could go on by the hour about his friendships, and the faculty he had for making people happy. Physically, he had little strength, and your father was very unjust to him—"

"Can't we leave dad out of this, mother?"

"You are so like your uncle! Serapion could never bear to hear anyone criticized, no matter how the person had treated him. 'My happiness,' he would say, 'is in living at harmony with all. Clayton,' your father, he meant, of course, 'Clayton is a splendid man, whom I admire. His own fine energy and capacities make him unduly hard, perhaps, toward those less gifted. I try to console myself with the thought that life has several sides. Love—kindliness—good humor—I am at least fortunate in rousing the gentlest qualities in most of those about me. Who knows? From the beginning, that may have been my mission in life, and I was given a delicate constitution that I might have leisure merely to live, love, and be loved in return!'

"Of course, he wouldn't have expressed that beautiful thought to everyone, but Serapion knew that I would understand—yes, dear, I shall come to your part in the story directly.

"Serapion passed to his reward before you were born, my son. He went from us in January, and you came into the world the April following. The doctors had told him that only a few hours were left him of life. When Serapion learned that he asked to be left alone with me for a little while. I remember every word of that beautiful conversation. I remember how he laid his hand on mine and pressed it feebly.

" 'Do as I ask, Evelyn,' he said. 'If the child is a boy, give him my name. I only ask second place. Clayton has first right; but let the boy have my name, as well as his father's. I've been too happy in my life—too happy in my loves and friendships. I can't bear to die utterly out of this good old world. I haven't a child of my own, but if you'd just give your boy—my name. Some day he will ask why, and then you are to tell him that—it's because—I was so happy!' '

Mother was sobbing, but after a moment she regained self-control to continue. "You may think it weak in me to cry over my brother, who passed long ago. But he has lived in my memory. And he said: 'Some people only talk of life after death, but I believe in it. It is really true that we go out to go on. I know it. There is something bright and strong in me, Evelyn, that only grows stronger as I feel the body dying from about me. Bright, strong, and clear-sighted. I have never been quite like other men. Not even you have understood me, and perhaps that is for the best.'

"With his hand on mine he smiled, and, oh, Clayton, I have wondered many times since what that smile meant! It was so beautiful that—that it was almost terrible!

" 'I love life,' he went on, 'and I shall live beyond this perishing clay. Soon or late, a day will come when you will feel my living presence in the house, and it will be in that time that your son will ask of me. Then you will tell him all I have said, and also this:

" 'That I promised to return—to watch over him—to guard him.

" 'Name him for me, that I may have the power. There's power in a name! And I am not as other men. Be very sure that—your son—Serapion—shall be—as happy—shall have all that I've had—of life. Believe—promise!' And I promised.

"THE strangest look came into his eyes. A look of"—my mother's voice sank to a hushed whisper—"I can only describe it as holy exultation! It was too vivid and triumphant to have been of this

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world. And he died in my arms—Clayton, why do you look at me like that? What is the matter, child?"

"Nothing. You told the story so well that for a moment I seemed to—to see him—or something. Never mind me. Mother, haven't you any picture of my uncle?"

"Only one of him as he was in his latter years. I have kept it locked away, for fear it might be destroyed or injured." Mother rose and started looking in a bureau drawer. "I am so glad that you take this seriously, Clayton. You feel nearly as deeply about it as I, don't you, dear?"

I wished to see that picture. At the same time I dreaded unspeakably the moment when doubt might become certainty.

My mother took out a flat package, wrapped in yellowed tissue paper. She began to undo the silk cord tied around it. I turned my back suddenly. Then I felt something thrust into my hand. With all my will I forced myself to bring the thing around before my eyes.

What face would stare back at me, eye to eye, amused, pleasant—

The window-shades were still drawn, and the light dim. It was a moment before I realized that what I held was not a picture at all, but some kind of printed pamphlet.

"Raise the shade," said my mother. "I wish you to read that. It is a little memorial of your uncle, written by one of his friends, a Mr. Hazlett. The words are so touching! Almost as beautiful as the thoughts Serapion himself often expressed."

"Would you mind"—I controlled my voice by an effort—"would you mind letting me see the picture first?"

This time she had handed me the unmistakable, polished, bescrolled oblong of an old-fashioned photographer's mounting.

Defiance, last resource of the hard-pressed, drove me in two bold strides to the window, where I jerked the shade up.

Daylight beat in. This was the middle of November and the light was gray, filtered through gray clouds. A few scattered particles of snow flickered past the window.

In my fingers the polished face of a cardboard mount felt smooth, almost soft to the touch. I watched the snow.

"Isn't his face beautiful, dear?" demanded a voice at my shoulder.

"I—I—yes, I'm afraid—of course, mother!"

"But you are not looking at it!"

"I did look," I lied. "I—this has all been a little too much for me. Take it—put it away. No, I'll read the memorial another time. Happy! Did he promise to—to come back and make me *happy?*"

"Practically that. How like him you are, dear son! He was sensitive, too; and your eyes! You have the Barbour nose and forehead, but your eyes—"

"Please, mother!"

She let me go at last, and in the quiet of refuge behind the locked door of my bedroom, I, who after all had not dared to look upon the picture of Serapion, scrutinized thoroughly every feature of my own face in the mirror.

Like him! She had often said so in the past, but the statement had failed to make any particular impression.

Yes, she was right about the eyes. They were the same clear, light-blue as his—what? Never! Not as *his*. For all I knew by actual observation, Serapion's eyes might have been sea-green or shell-pink. *I had never seen him.* Let me keep that fact firmly in mind.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EATER OF LIVES

MY FACE in the mirror bore a faint sketchy resemblance to that of the unreal but none the less troublesome vision by which I was intermittently afflicted. The resemblance accounted for the vague familiarity that had enveloped it from the first.

The face in the mirror, though, was much younger, and—resolve flared up in its eyes like a lighted fire.

"You," I addressed my reflection, "are not a sneak. You are not going to be made one. Tonight you will present yourself to Mr. James Barton Moore, and you will inform him that the little trick of hypnotism performed by his wife last August will either be reversed by her, or he himself will pay for it unpleasantly. I believe," and my arm muscles flexed in bravado, "that Mr. Jimmy Moore will think twice before he refuses."

That was what I said. But in my heart I yearned suddenly to go and fling myself, abject, at the feet of Alicia Moore, and entreat her to help me.

IT WAS a cold night, and the afternoon's scattered flakes had increased to a heavy snow-fall. Alighting from the car—not

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mine, this time, but the transit company's—I found the snow inches deep. I can still recall the feel of it blown against my face, like light, cold finger-touches.

Plowing through it, I came again to the "dead-alive house." That other visit had been in summer. The twin lawns, one green and close-cropped, the other high-grown with weeds, had stood out contrastingly then. There had been a line of sharp demarcation between Moore's clean, freshly painted half of the house and the other half's dirt-freckled wall.

Now all that sharp difference was blurred and indistinct. The snow, blue-white in the swaying circles of light from a corner arc-lamp, had buried both the lawns. Joining the roofs in whiteness, drifting across the porches, swirling in the air, it obliterated all but a hint of difference between the living half and the dead.

Though the windows of one part were dark as those of the other, a faint glow shone through the curtained glazing of Moore's door.

Now that I was here, I almost hoped that

"With all the strength I had, I struck at the face I hated, and something bright flashed at the same time from the cabinet"

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he and his wife were out. The accusation I must make was strange to absurdity. I braced myself, however, opened the gate, and as I did so a hand dropped on my shoulder from behind.

A man had come upon me soundlessly through the snow. In my nerve-racked state, I whirled and struck at him.

He caught my wrist. "Here! I'm no highwayman, Clay!"

"Nils," I laughed shakily, "you startled me."

Berquist stared, with a sudden close attention that I found myself shrinking from. For weeks I had been keeping a secret at some cost. Though I had come here to reveal it, the habit of concealment was still on me.

"Your nerves used to be better than that," said Berquist shortly.

"You calling on Moore?" I queried. "Thought there was some kind of vendetta between you. You wouldn't come here with me, I remember."

"I'm glad you remember something," he retorted gravely. "You have a very nice, hospitable family, though. They took me in last night and fed me on the bare strength of my word that I'd been invited."

"I say, Nils, that's too bad."

In my desperate search for Van the previous evening, I had clean forgotten my dinner invitation to Berquist. Reaching home near midnight, I had received a thoroughly sisterly call-down from Cathy, who had waited up to express her frank opinion of a brother who not only invited a friend to dinner without forewarning her, but neglected even to be present when the friend arrived.

It seemed, too, that Roberta had dined there on Cathy's own invitation, and the two girls had unitedly agreed that poor Nils was "odd" and not very desirable. He had committed the double offense of talking wild theories to dad, verbally ignoring the feminine element, and at the same time staring Bert out of countenance whenever her eyes were not actually on him.

I had informed Cathy that Bert should feel highly honored, since Nils was generally too shy even to look at a girl, much less stare at her, and that as the family's support I should certainly invite whom I pleased to dinner; as for Nils, I had regretted missing him, but knew he was too casual himself to hold the lapse against me.

Now I began an apology that was rather wandering, for my mind was otherwise concerned.

I wished to tell him about the Fifth Presence. Before I entered Moore's house, it would be very well that I should tell Nils of my errand. Why, in the name all reason, was I possessed by this sense of shame that shut my lips whenever I tried to open them concerning the haunting face?

Cutting the apologies short, Nils forgave me, explained that though out of sympathy with Moore's work, he occasionally called to play chess with him, and then we were going up the snow-blanketed walk, side by side.

"EVEN the chess sometimes ends in a row," Nils added gloomily. "I wouldn't play him at all, if he hadn't beaten me so many times. Perhaps some day I'll get the score even, and then I sha'n't come here any more."

"Moore is—did he ever tell you that I kept my appointment with him?"

"Which one?"

The question leaped out cuttingly sharp.

"The only one I ever made with him, of course. That day you introduced me to him in the restaurant."

"You haven't been coming here since?"

"No. Why should you think that?"

We had checked again, half-way up the walk. As we stood Nils caught my shoulders and swung me around till the arc-lamp rays beat on my face. He scrutinized me from under frowning brows.

"You've lost something!" he said bluntly. "I can't tell exactly what. I don't know what story your eyes hide; but they hide one. Clay, don't think me an officious meddler, but you—you have your family dependent on you—and—oh, why do I beat about the bush? That girl you will marry some day; she's rather wonderful. For her sake, if not your own, tell me the truth. Has Moore involved you in some of his cursed, dangerous experiments? Tell me! Is it that, or"—his voice softened—"are you merely worn out with the common and comparatively safe kinds of trouble?"

"I've had—trouble enough to worry any fellow."

"Yes, but is any part of it to be laid at this door?" He jerked his head toward Moore's dimly radiant portal.

"A face—a face—" Sheer panic choked

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the words in my throat. I had begun betraying the secret which every atom of my being demanded should be kept.

"Yes; a face?"

"A face—is not necessarily a chart of the owner's doings," I wrenched roughly from his grasp. "Since when have you set up as a critic in physiognomy, Nils?"

"When one has a friend, one cares to look beneath the surface," he said simply.

"Well, don't look with the air of hunting out a criminal, then. I have as good a right to call here as you, haven't I? Moore sent me a letter asking me to drop around, so I—I thought I would. I'm tired, and need distraction. What's the harm?"

Without answering, he eyed me through a long moment; then turned quietly and went on up into the porch.

Standing hesitant, I glanced upward, looking for a light in the windows above. Again I saw the slanting roofs, blended in snow. Months ago, in a momentary illusion of moonlight, I had seen them look just so. The thought brought me a tiny prick of apprehension. Not fear, but the startled uneasiness one might feel at coming to a place one has never visited, and knowing it for the place one has seen in a dream.

Nevertheless, I followed Nils to the door. Another maid opened it than the one who had admitted Roberta and myself in August. She was a great, craggy, hard-faced old colored woman, whom Nils addressed rather familiarly as "Sabina," and who made him rather glumly welcome in accents that betrayed her Southern origin. She assumed, I suppose, that Nils and I had come together, and my card did not precede me into Moore's sanctum.

The latter was in the library again. The shades and curtains were drawn tight which accounted for the "not-at-home" look of the windows from outside. I learned later that he frequently denied himself to callers, even near acquaintances, unless they came by appointment. His letter to me had been ignored too long to come under that heading. I wonder! Would he have refused to see me that night, given a choice?

In my very first step across the library's threshold, I realized that my battle was to be an even more difficult one than I had feared.

Passing the doorway I entered—physically and consciously entered—the same field of tension, to call it that, which had centralized about Alicia at the climax of my previous experience.

It was less masterful than then. There was not the same drain on my physical strength, nor the feeling of being in harmony with the movements of others. But the condition was none the less present; I knew it as surely and actually as one recognizes a marked change in atmospheric temperature or, to use a closer simile, as one feels entry into the radius of electrical force produced by a certain type of powerful generator.

There are no words which will exactly express what I mean. The consciousness involved is other than normal, and only a person who had been possessed by it could fully understand.

On that first occasion, I had been sure that my impressions were shared by the others present. This time some minutes passed before I became convinced that Berquist and James Moore, at least, were insensitive to the condition.

THE library appeared as I had seen it first, save that the lamp broken then had been replaced by another, with a Japanese "art" shade made of painted silk. Near the large reading-table, with the lamp, a small stand had been drawn up and a chess-board laid on it. In anticipation of Nils's arrival Moore had been arranging the pieces. They were red and white ivory men, finely carved. They and the Japanese lamp-shade made a glow of exotic color, in the shadow behind which sat—Alicia, a dim figure, pallid and immobile.

By one of those surface thoughts that flash across moments of intensity, I noted that Moore was dressed in a gray suit, patterned with a faint, large check in lighter gray.

Then Moore had recognized me, and the man's pale eyebrows lifted:

"You've brought Barbour?" he said to Nils.

"No," denied my friend. "Met him at the door. How do, Alicia?"

He strode across the room to where Mrs. Moore sat in the shadow.

Under other conditions I should have felt embarrassed. By Moore's tone and Nils's non-committal response, they placed me as an intruder, received without even a gloss of welcome for courtesy's sake.

But to me it seemed only strange that they could speak at all in ordinary tones

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through this atmosphere of breathless tension. A voice here, I thought, should be either a shriek or a whisper.

Then Alicia's dry monotone.

"You should have come alone, Nils. You have brought one with you who is very evil. I know him. He is an eater of lives."

"Dear lady!" protested Nils, half jokingly. "Surely you don't apply that cannibalistic description to my friend here? He might take it that way."

"How he takes it is nothing," shrugged Alicia. "There are four of us here, *and there is also a fifth.* And I think your friend is more aware of that than even I."

Moore's previously unenthusiastic face lighted to quick eagerness. He pounced on Alicia's original phrase like a cat jumping for a mouse.

"An eater of life! Did you say this invisible Fifth Presence is an 'eater of life,' Alicia?"

"I did not," she retorted precisely. "I said an eater of lives. Everyone does not know that—"

"No, but wait, Alicia. This is really interesting." He turned from her to us. "There's a particularly horrid old German legend about such a being." He informed us of it with the air of one imparting some delightful news. "Give me a German legend always for pure horror, but this excels the average. *'Der verschlingener des Lebens'*—'The Devourer of Life.' Very—interesting. Now the question arises, did Alicia read that yarn some time in the past, and is this the subliminal report of it coming out, or does she really sense an alien force which has entered the room in your company? What's your impression, Barbour? Have you any? You're psychic yourself—knew it the first time I saw you. Is anyone here but we four?"

By a great effort, I forced my lips to answer:

"I couldn't say. This—I—"

"Have a chair, Barbour, and take your time." He was all sudden kindliness—the active sort, with a motive behind it, as I knew well enough now. To him I was not a guest but an experiment. "I haven't a doubt," he asserted cheerfully, "that you and Alicia sense a presence that entered with you and which such poor moles as Nils and myself are blind to. Now don't deny it. Anyone possessing the psychic gift who denies or tries to smother it is not only unwise but selfish. Su-premely selfish! And it's a curious fact that one powerful psychic will often bring out the undeveloped potentialities in another. Alicia may have already done that for you. When you were here before—"

"That will do!" Abruptly deserting Alicia, Nils strode down upon us. There was wrath in every line of his dark face. "Jimmy, that boy is my friend! If he has 'psychic potentialities,' as you call it, let 'em alone. He doesn't wish to develop into a ghost-ridden, hysterical, semi-human monstrosity, with one foot in this world and the other across the border."

"Really," drawled Moore, "that description runs beyond even the insolence I've learned to expect from you, Berquist. My wife is a psychic."

Nils was not too easily crushed, but this time he had brought confusion on himself. "Ghost-ridden, hysterical, semi-human monstrosity" may have been an excellent description of Alicia. It is certain, however, that Nils had forgotten her when he voiced it. He flushed to the ears and stammered through an apology, to which Moore listened in grim silence.

Then Alicia spoke, with her customary dry directness.

"I am not offended. My guides do not like you, Nils, but that is because your opposition interferes with the work. Personally I like you for speaking frankly always. Take your unfortunate young friend, Mr. Barbour, and go away now."

"Alicia!" Moore was half pleading, half indignant. "You agreed with me that Barbour had possibilities of mediumship almost as great as your own. And yet you send him away. Think of the work!"

"I tried to send him away the first time." From beyond the lamp Alicia's enormous eyes glinted mockingly at her husband. "You believed," she went on, "that Mr. Barbour was naturally psychic, but undeveloped. Many times we have disagreed in similar cases. Your theory that more than half the human race might, properly trained, be sensitive to the etheric vibrations of astral and spiritual beings is true enough."

"Then why did you—"

"Don't argue, James. That tires me. I say that your belief is correct. But I have told you and, through me, my guides have told you that not everyone who is a natural sensitive is worthy of being developed."

"I consulted you"—Moore's voice trembled

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with suppressed irritation—"I consulted you, and you—"

"I said that a tremendous psychic possibility enveloped Mr. Barbour. That was true. Had I told you that the possibility was evil, that would have been equally true. But you would not have yielded to my judgment, and sent him away—as I tried to do."

"Alicia," cried her husband, "are we never to have any clear understandings?"

"Possibly not," she said, with cool indifference. "I am—what I am. Also I am a channel for all forces, good or evil. My guides protect me, of course. They will not let any bad spirit harm me. But I think Mr. Barbour was not glad that he stayed when I wished him to go. He has come back to me for help. I am not sure that I wish to help him. It was a long time before I was rested from my first struggle with the One he is afraid of."

NILS made an impatient movement. "I don't believe Clay needs any help except—pardon me, Alicia—except to keep away from this house and you."

"Then why did he return here?"

"Because," interpolated Moore, with a scowl for Nils, "he grew interested in his own possibilities. This attempt to frighten him is not only absurd, but the worst thing possible for him. Of course the invisible forces are of different kinds, and of course some of them are inimical. But fear is the only dangerous weapon they have. If they can't frighten you, they can't harm you."

"Alicia," cut in Nils, "seems to disagree there."

"Alicia does agree. She inclines to repel the so-called evil beings, not from fear of them, but because they are more apt to trespass than the friendlier powers. They demand too much of her strength. In consequence, I have had an insufficient opportunity to study them. If Barbour is psychic—and I should say that he very obviously is—then his strength, combined with Alicia's, should be great enough for almost any strain. You are interfering here, Berquist. I won't have it. I—will—not—have—it."

"And my friend is to be sacrificed so that you may study demonology?"

"Berquist, I have nothing to do with demons or daevas, devils or flibbertigibbets. You use the nomenclature of a past age."

"Verschlingener des Lebens!" quoted Nils quickly. "You didn't boggle over nomenclature when Alicia warned us that an 'eater of life' was present."

"Oh, give me patience!" groaned Moore. "I try to trace a reference, and you—" He broke off and wheeled to the small, shadowy figure beyond the lamplight. "Alicia, exactly what did you mean when you said that an 'eater of lives' had entered the room? You can put us straight there, at least."

"I meant," drawled Alicia, "one of those quaint, harmless beings whom you are so anxious to study at anybody's expense. Not a demon, certainly, in the sense that Nils means. But not company I care for, either. No, I am not afraid of this one. He has the strength of an enormous greed—of a dead spirit who covets life—but he will not trap me again into lending my strength to his purpose."

"His! Whose? Do be plain for once, Alicia."

"I try to be," she retorted composedly. "I could give him a name that one of you at least would recognize. But that would please him too well. There is power in a name. Everyone does not know that, nor how to use it. This one does. He bears his name written across his forehead. He wills that I shall see it and speak it now. Once he surprised me into speaking it, but that was Mr. Barbour's fault. He threw me off balance at a critical moment by turning on the lights. You have probably forgotten the name I spoke then, but I doubt if Mr. Barbour has forgotten. This one whom I refuse to name has no power over me. I have many friends among the living dead who protect me from such dead spirits as this one—"

"Just a minute, Alicia!" Moore was exaggeratedly patient. "I can believe in a dead body, and through you I've come to believe in live spirits, disembodied. But a dead spirit! That would be like an extinguished flame. It would have no existence."

She shook her head. "Please don't argue, James. You know that tires me. A spirit cannot perish. But a spirit may die, and having died, exist in death eternal. There is life eternal and there is death eternal. There are the living spirits of the so-called dead. They are many and harmless. My guides are of their number. Also there are dead spirits. They are the ones to beware of, because they covet life. Such a one is he whom I called 'an eater of lives,' and who is better known to Mr. Barbour than to me. That is not my fault, however, and now I wish no

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more to do with any of it. I must insist, James, that you ask Mr. Barbour to leave. In fact, if he remains in the house five minutes longer I shall go out of it."

Her strange eyes opened suddenly till a gleam of white was plainly visible all around the wide blackness of them. Her porcelain, doll-like placidity vanished in an instant.

"Make him go!" she cried. "I tell you, there is an evil in this room which is accumulating force every moment. I tell you, something bad is coming. Bad! Do you hear me? And I won't be involved in it. I won't! I won't!"

Her voice rose to a querulous shriek. A spasm twitched every feature. And then she had sunk back in her chair with drooped lids.

"Bad!" she murmured softly.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCARLET HORROR

"You will have to go, Barbour," said Moore heavily. "I am sorry, but there are occasions when Alicia must be humored. This seems to be one of them. Unfortunate. Very—unfortunate. Perhaps another time—"

He paused and glanced suggestively toward the door.

All the while that they had argued and quarreled over me, I had sat as apparently passive as the lay figure to which I had once compared Alicia. It was, however, the passivity not of inertia, but of high-keyed endurance. What Alicia felt I don't know. If it was anything like the strain I suffered under, I can't wonder that she wished to be rid of me.

"Another time," said Moore, and looked toward the door.

I rose. Instantly Berquist was beside me. He took my arm—tried to draw me away—out of the room.

I shook him off. When I moved it was toward Alicia. Before either Moore or Nils realized my objective, I was half-way around the table. Alicia, her eyes still closed, moaned softly. She cried out, and thrust forth her hands in a resisting motion:

"Stop!"

That was Moore's voice; but it was not for his sharp command that I halted. There was—it was as if a wall had risen between Alicia and me. Or as if her out-stretched hands were against my chest, holding me back. Yet there was a space of at least two yards between us.

"What do you want, Barbour?" demanded Moore roughly. "I said you would have to go!"

"I wish," I forced out, "to make *her* undo what she has done to me!"

"Then I was right!" cried Berquist indignantly.

I stood still, swept by wave upon wave of the force that willed to absorb me. The past weeks had trained me for such a struggle. Though the face of the Fifth Presence remained invisible, its identity with the intangible power I fought was clear enough to me—and I hated the face! I repulsed the enveloping consciousness of it as one strives to fling off a loathsome caress.

While I stood there, blind, silent, at war, Berquist continued:

"Now I know that I was right! Jimmy, you have let this boy suffer in some way that I neither understand nor wish wholly to understand. But believe me, you'll answer for it! Clay, lad, come away! You are courting disaster here. Alicia can't help you. She is a poor slave and tool for any force that would use her. Why, the very atmosphere of this house is contagious! Psychic! Many people are immune. Moore is immune. But I tell you, there has been more than one time when I have resolutely shut my senses against the influence, or Alicia would have dragged me into her own field of abnormal and accursed perceptiveness. It's because I resist that they won't have me at a seance. Come away!"

"No!" They could not guess, of course, that I spoke from out a swimming darkness, slashed with streaks of scarlet. "No!" I muttered again. "This woman here—she can help me. She shall help me! Moore, I'll—I'll wring your neck if you don't make her help me!"

Through the swimming scarlet-slashed gloom I drove forward another step. Came a rush of motion. There was a vast, muffled sound as of beating wings. A trumpet-like voice cried out loudly: "I'll settle with you once for all!" it shouted. And then something had thrust in between Alicia and me.

Instantly the gloom lifted.

There at my right hand was the large table, with the shaded lamp and the books and papers strewn over it. To my left the massive, empty chair in which Alicia was wont to be imprisoned during a seance.

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Beyond that hung the straight, black folds of the curtains which concealed the cabinet.

Though I turned my head to neither side, I saw all these things as though looking directly at them. And also, with even more unusual distinctness, I saw what was straight ahead of me.

Between me and Alicia the figure of a man had sprung into sudden existence. In no way did this figure suggest the ghostly form one might expect from what is called "materialization." The man was real—solid.

He was of stocky, but not very powerful build. He was dressed in gray. His face—ah! Only once before had I seen this man's face with open gaze. But many times it had haunted my closed lids!

Smooth, boyish, pleasant, with smiling lips and clear, light-blue eyes—my own eyes, save that the amused gleam in them did not express a boy's unsophisticated humor.

Not a bodiless face this time, afloat in mid air or lurking behind my lids. This was the man himself—the whole, solid, flesh-and-blood man!

I COULD not doubt that he was real. His hand caught my arm—roughly for all that amiable gentleness the face expressed. I felt the clutching fingers tight and heavy. He clutched and at the same time smiled, sweetly, amusedly. Clutched and smiled.

"Serapion!" I whispered. And "*Serapion!*"

His smile grew a trifle brighter; his clutch tightened. But I was no longer afraid of him. The very strain I had been under flung me suddenly to a height of exalted courage. Instinctive loathing climaxed in rebellion.

He clasped my left arm tight. My right was free. I had no weapon, but caught up from the table a thing that served as one.

And even as I did it, that clear side-vision I have referred to beheld a singular happening. As my head grew hot with a rush of exultant blood, something came flying out through the curtains of the cabinet.

It was bright scarlet in color, and about the size of a pigeon or small hawk. I am not sure that it had the shape of a bird. The size and the peculiarly brilliant scarlet of it are all I am sure of.

This red thing flashed out of the cabinet, darted across the room, passing chest-high through the narrow space between the suddenly embodied Fifth Presence and myself—and vanished.

I heard Alicia crying: "Bad—*bad!* It has come!"

And then, in all the young strength of my right arm, I struck at the Fifth Presence. My aim was the face I hated. The weapon—a queer enough one, but efficient—sank deep, deep—buried half its length in one of those smiling, light-blue eyes.

He let go my arm and dashed his hand to his face. The weapon remained in the wound. From around it, even before my victim fell, blood gushed out—scarlet—scarlet. Below the edge of his clutching hand that would clutch me no more I could see his mouth, and—Heaven help me!—the lips of it smiled still.

Then he had writhed and crumpled down in a loose gray heap at my feet.

"Barbour! For mercy's sake!"

The man I struck had sunk without a sound. That hoarse, harsh shout came from Nils. Next instant his powerful arm sent me spinning half across the room. I didn't care. He dropped to his knees. When he tried to straighten the gray heap, his hands were instantly bright with the grim color that had been the flying scarlet thing's.

But I didn't care!

I had killed him—it! The Fifth Presence had dared embody itself in flesh and I had slain it!

Nils had the body straight now, face upward. The light of the lamp beat down. Creeping tiptoe, I came to peer over Nils' shoulder. The lips. Did they still smile?

Then—

But there is an extremity of feeling with which words are inadequate to deal. Leave my emotions and let me state here bare facts.

The gray suit in which I had seen the Fifth Presence clothed was the same faintly checked light suit I had wondered at Moore's wearing in November.

And the face there in the lamplight, contorted, ashen, blood-smeared, was the face of James Barton Moore!

THOUGH I had a few obscure after-memories of loud talking, of blue uniforms that crowded in around me, of going downstairs and out into open air, of being pushed into a clumsy vehicle of some kind, and of interminable riding through a night cold and sharply white with snow, all the real consciousness of me hovered in a timeless, spaceless agony, whereby it could

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neither reason nor take right account of these impressions.

Thrust in a cell at last, I must have lain down and, from pure weariness of pain, fallen asleep. Shortly after dawn, however, I awoke to a dreary, clear-headed cognizance of facts. I knew I had killed.

When I threatened, Moore had sprung in between me and his wife, intending, no doubt with that hot temper of his, to put me violently from the house. His physical intervention had shocked me out of the swimming shadows, then rapidly closing in, and the Fifth Presence had chosen that opportunity for its most ghastly trick.

The face I had struck at was a wraith—a vision. My weapon—one of those paper files that are made with a heavy bronze base and an upright, murderously sharp-pointed rod—had gone home in the real face behind. Instead of slaying an embodied ghost—a madman's dream—I had murdered a living man!

Last night the killing and the atrocious manner of it had been enough. This morning, thought had a wider scope. I perceived that the isolated horror of the act itself was less than all. I must now take up the heavy burden of consequences.

The hard bed on which I lay, the narrow walls and the bars that encompassed me—these were symbols by which I foreread my fate.

I, Clayton Barbour, was a murderer. In that gray, early clear-headedness I made no bones about the word or fact.

True, I had been tricked, trapped into murder; but who would believe that? Alicia—perhaps. And how would Alicia's weird testimony be received in a court of justice, even should she prove willing to give it?

I perceived that I was finished—done for.

Life as I was familiar with it had already ended, and the short, ugly course that remained to be run would end soon enough.

Then for the first time I learned what the love of life is. Life—not as consciousness, nor a state of being, nor a thought; but the warm, precious thing we are born to and carry lightly till the time of its loss is upon us.

Afterward? What were dim afterwards to me? Grant that I, of all men, had reason to know that the dying body cast forth its spirit as a persistent entity. Grant that the thin shadows of ourselves survived the flesh. That was not life!

Let me grow old in life, till its vital flood ran low, and its blood thinned, and its flesh shriveled, and weariness came to release me from desire. Then, perhaps, I should be glad of that leap into the cold world of shadows. Now—now—I was *young*.

The injustice of it! I sprang up, driven to express revolt in action. For lack of a better outlet, I beat with closed fists against the wall—the bars. A lumpish, besotted creature in the cell next to mine roused and snarled like a beast at the noise.

Presently one of the keepers came tramping along the narrow alley between wall and cages.

I had retreated a little from the bars. I was not sure how this warder would look at me, a murderer. My new character was strange to me. Instinctively I shrank from being seen in it.

He peered through.

"C'm here!" he hissed softly. Puzzled, I moved nearer. "Take this!"

Then I saw that through one of the square apertures of cross-grating a folded bit of paper had been thrust. I drew it through to my side, though with no notion of what it could be. The man drew off again.

"I'll see that ya get some coffee, Barbour," he said, in a loud, offhand voice. "Morning, Mike! Early, ain't ya?" He turned to me again. "This here's Mike Megonigle. Slip him a dollar fer me as ya pass out, an' then ya won't owe me nothin'."

A red-faced, bull-necked individual had tramped into view. He stared heavily from my grating to the night warder and back again.

"'S all right, Mike," the latter asserted. "This here's Mr. Barbour. Pal of his croaked a guy last night. Barbour ain't implicated. Just a witness. He'll be getting his bond pretty quick, and when he goes out you collect that dollar for me, Mike. Can't afford to lose that dollar—not me, huh?"

He winked jovially in my direction, waved a hand on one finger of which was something which glittered brightly, and was gone. The other guard grunted, stared after him for a long minute, and moved on up the passage, still speechless and shaking his head in a slow, puzzled manner, like a bewildered ox.

BUT his bewilderment could not have been so great as my own. The thing that glittered on the night-guard's finger had

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attracted my attention before he waved it. It was a ring that had a strangely familiar look. The setting was an oval bit of lapis lazuli, cut flat, incised with a tiny device the scrolls of which had been filled with gold, and surrounded by small diamonds.

Nils Berquist wore a ring like that. It was the one possession I had ever known him to prize, and that was because it had been in his family for generations. It was very old, and different from modern rings.

A duplicate? Nonsense! Why was that warder wearing Nils's ring—and what had he meant by describing me as a "witness"?

But I think some of the truth had begun to dawn on me even before I unfolded the paper that had been thrust through my grate. The inner side carried a lead-pencil scrawl, written in French. As the light in the cell was bad, and Berquist's handwriting worse, I had more than a little trouble in deciphering it.

I had read it all, however, before the return of the night-warder—that superbly corrupt official who took a bribe to deliver a message, honestly delivered it, and thereafter brazenly wore the bribe about his duties. He returned with some coffee. I was face down on the shelf that served for a bed. He rattled the grate, spoke, and as I didn't answer shoved the coffee under the door and went off—whistling, I fancy.

I couldn't have spoken to him if I had wished, because I was crying like a girl. The reaction from friendless solitude in a world made new and terrible had hit me just that way. It was not that I meant to accept Nils's sacrifice. I had not thought about the practical side of it yet. But to discover that a man who had actually seen me do that awful thing, in spite of it remained my friend and loyal to the amazing degree of taking the burden on himself—that changed the world round again, some way, and made it almost right again.

Why, the mere fact that Nils could think of me without abhorrence was enough! It restored to me all the love and friendship that had been mine, and from which last night's deed had seemed to irrevocably cut me off.

If Nils, then those nearer and dearer than Nils—Roberta— But there I halted and cringed back. That way there loomed a dreadful and inevitable loss, Let contemplation of it wait awhile.

With wet eyes I sat up and again held Nils's message in the barred light that fell through the grating. He had protected his meaning by using a safer language than English—safe from the warder, at least—and couching it in terms whose real import would be obscure if it fell into other hands. At that his sacrifice was endangered in the sending, but not so much as by leaving me to blurt out the truth unwarned:

My dear Friend:

This to you, who last night were past understanding. May the morning have brought you a clear mind. I take the chance and write. I killed James Moore. Understand me when I say this. He struck at me, but I wrested away the weapon and killed in self-defense and not in intent.

There followed a rather circumstantial account of his supposed struggle with Moore. Nils's brain had not been numbed last night, like mine. Into this story which he had made for us both to tell he had fitted the least possible fiction. Questioned on details up to almost the moment of Moore's death, we had only to stick to the truth and we could not disagree. It was a clever—a noble lie that he had arranged.

You will bear witness to all this, and they will not convict me of murder. Alicia Moore had fainted. She did not witness Moore's death. I rely on you, therefore, as my sole witness. And it is fortunate that Moore in his anger turned not on you, but attacked me! I know you, dear friend, and that you would take my place and bear all for me, if that were possible. But I have not one in the world, save you, to suffer the anguish for my trouble. I have little to lose.

Not for your own sake, then, but for the sake of those to whom you are all—for the sake of her whose life-happiness rests with you to hold sacred or shatter, *I command you*—to be glad that I and not you have this to go through with. For that I shall not think the less of you. I only ask that in your heart I be held always as a friend.

Nils Berquist

To accept would be dishonor unthinkable.

Even the weight of the thinly veiled argument he put forward must be outbalanced by the shame of allowing an innocent man to risk the most disgraceful of deaths in my stead. I could not accept, yet though I died, the wonder of Nils Berquist's attempted loyalty should go with me—out there!

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Out there! Into that dim, guessed-at coldness, with its shadowy, mocking inhabitants.

"You are right!" said a voice. "That world is to yours as the shadow to reality. But why cast the real life away?"

HAD one of the warders entered my cell and addressed me, his voice could have echoed no more distinctly in my brain. Before I looked up, however, I knew what I should see. When, raising my own eyes, they met those clear, light-blue ones, I felt no surprise.

There floated the face, bodiless again, but aside from that with an appearance of substantiality which equaled—it could not exceed—that of its last tragic visitation. The undimensional flatness had given way to the solidly modeled curves of living flesh.

The point of my improvised weapon, however, had left not even a mark on the face it was meant for. That material aspect was false. Though I hated him now with an added loathing, I had learned bitterly that combat with him must be on other than physical ground. I sat sternly quiet, hoping that if I did not answer, the presence would vanish.

"Your violent temper," he continued pleasantly, but with a trace of kindly reproach, "has placed you in danger. Fortunately we—you and I—are not as other men. We need not be overborne. Tell me, which of all the forces that influence life is the strongest?"

"Hate!" Springing erect, I thrust forward till my face almost touched that of the Presence. "Such *hate* as I feel for you!"

He did not retreat. I could—I could almost have sworn that I felt the warmth of his flesh close to mine!

"Aw-w-w-w-, cut it out!" wailed the dweller in the next cell. "Ain't yer never goin' ter let a guy git his beauty sleep?"

"You need not speak so loud," smiled the face. "And I would suggest that you sit down. Consider the feelings of others! Consideration is a beautiful quality, and well worth cultivating. Speech between you and me need disturb no one. It can be silent as thought, for it is thought—my thought to yours. Sit down!"

A sudden weakening of the knees made me obey him. Revilings I could have withstood; curses, or threats of evil. But there was an awful sweetness and beauty in the face—a calm assurance about his preaching phrases—that frightened me as threats could not have done. Could it be that I had misjudged this serene being from beyond the border?

Then I looked in his eyes and knew that I had not. They were too like my own! I understood them. Another he might have deceived, but never me.

"Hate," he continued, in his placid, leisurely manner, "is a futile, boomerang force that invariably reacts on itself. It is the scorpion among forces, stinging itself to destruction. No; I did not come here to preach. You understand now that I spoke the truth and can read your unvoiced thoughts with perfect readiness. Our conversations are thus safe from eavesdroppers. As I was saying, hate is its own enemy and the enemy of life. There is but one invincible power, offered by God to man, and which God has commanded man to use."

"You mean—"

"Love! Armored in love, your life will be a sacred, guarded joy to you. Believe me! I am far older than I appear, and wiser than I am old. Guided by me, guarded by love, you have a beautiful future at your command."

"Begun with murder!" I snarled.

The Presence beamed patiently upon me. "That was a mistake. Don't blame yourself too severely. Blame me, if you like, though I had no idea that your foolish animosity would bring forth the red impulse of murder. Yes; we who have passed beyond can commit blunders! I made one in appearing when I did. Can't we forgive one another and forget?"

"Not while I am in jail for it and facing electrocution!" said I grimly.

"But you are not. Very shortly you will walk out a free man; under bond, it is true, but only—"

"Never!" I was on my feet again at that. "Let Nils Berquist suffer in my place? Never!"

"But he won't suffer! Or at least, not as you would. Come! Trust all that to me, who can see far, and have a certain power. Won't you trust me?"

"You mean that *you* can influence a jury to acquit him?"

"I have power! And think. Would you cast back his friendship in his face? Would you hurl your father into his grave, killed by horror? Would you drag your sister—your

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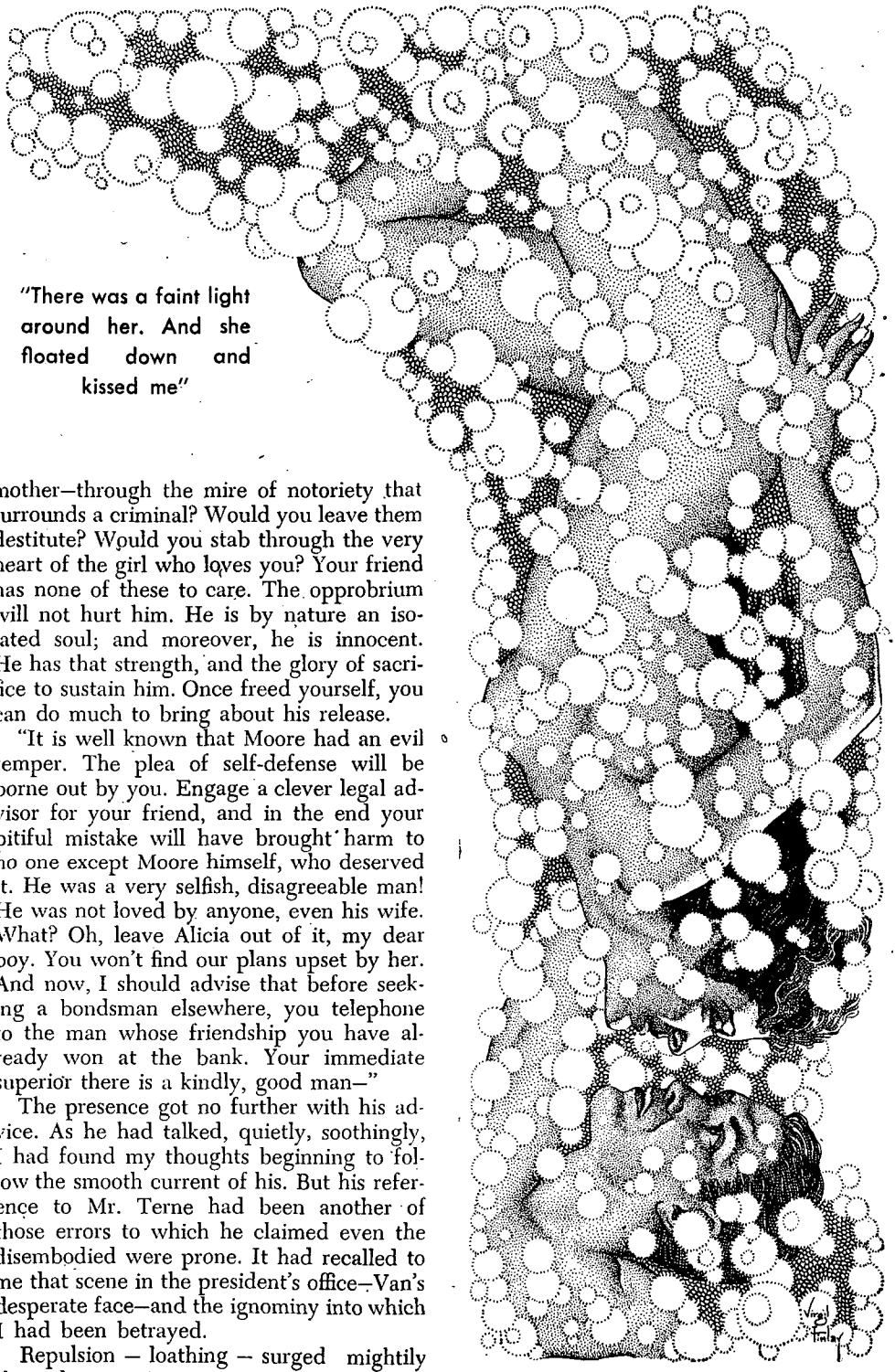

"There was a faint light around her. And she floated down and kissed me"

mother—through the mire of notoriety that surrounds a criminal? Would you leave them destitute? Would you stab through the very heart of the girl who loves you? Your friend has none of these to care. The opprobrium will not hurt him. He is by nature an isolated soul; and moreover, he is innocent. He has that strength, and the glory of sacrifice to sustain him. Once freed yourself, you can do much to bring about his release.

"It is well known that Moore had an evil temper. The plea of self-defense will be borne out by you. Engage a clever legal advisor for your friend, and in the end your pitiful mistake will have brought harm to no one except Moore himself, who deserved it. He was a very selfish, disagreeable man! He was not loved by anyone, even his wife. What? Oh, leave Alicia out of it, my dear boy. You won't find our plans upset by her. And now, I should advise that before seeking a bondsman elsewhere, you telephone to the man whose friendship you have already won at the bank. Your immediate superior there is a kindly, good man—"

The presence got no further with his advice. As he had talked, quietly, soothingly, I had found my thoughts beginning to follow the smooth current of his. But his reference to Mr. Terne had been another of those errors to which he claimed even the disembodied were prone. It had recalled to me that scene in the president's office—Van's desperate face—and the ignominy into which I had been betrayed.

Repulsion — loathing — surged mightily through my veins again.

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"No! No! No! In the name of Heaven, leave me!" I cried aloud. To my amazed relief the Presence obeyed. He had faded and gone in an instant—though by the last impression I had of him, he still smiled.

Trembling, I looked down at Nils's letter in my hand.

From the barred grating a shadow was cast upon it, and the form of that shadow was a cross.

CHAPTER X

SO LIKE HIM!

AROUND 2 p.m. I was taken before Magistrate Patterson and my bail set in the sum of thirty-five hundred dollars. Arthur Terne, second vice president of the Colossus Trust Company, having appeared as my bondsman, the matter of my liberty pending the inquest, to be held the following morning, was soon arranged.

I left the court in Mr. Terne's company. Nils Berquist I had not seen, but was given to understand that he had been remanded without bail. I had pleaded in vain for a chance to talk with him.

Mr. Terne was kindness personified, though I inferred from one or two remarks that the Colossus' president was shocked.

The morning papers had featured the affair with blatant headlines. They had got my name. The Barbour & Hutchinson failure was resurrected.

The Colossus itself stalked in massive dignity across one column, irrelevantly capping a "Brutal Slaying in Haunted House," and when I saw that, I knew that "not pleased" was a mild description for Vansittart's probable emotions!

The bizarre character of Alicia, the nature of the wound, and the ghastly inappropriateness of the weapon which effected it, had appealed to the reportorial fancy with diversely picturesque results. A plain murder, with no more apparent mystery attached than this one, would have passed with slight attention. But though Alicia was not a professional medium, it appeared that she and Moore had a certain reputation.

In hinting to me of the latter's tempestuous exit from the Psychic Research Association, Nils had spared mentioning Alicia as the bone of contention. I now learned that she had been a country girl, the daughter of a hotel-keeper in a tiny Virginian village where Moore had spent two or three autumn weeks.

Discovering in her what he regarded as supernormal powers, he wished to bring her north for further study. On her father's strangely objecting to this treatment of his daughter as a specimen, Moore had settled the difficulty by offering marriage. After the wedding, he did bring her north, educated her, and finally presented her to the Association as a prodigy well worth their attention.

Unfortunately, after several remarkable seances, she was convicted of fraud in flagrant degree. It was through the slightly heated arguments ensuing that Moore was asked to resign his directorship.

The fantastic dispute had amused the lay-public intermittently through a dull summer, but I was off in the mountains that year with Van, and what news we read was mostly on the sporting pages, whither the pros and cons of spiritualistic debate are not wont to penetrate. But all that was raked up now, as sauce for the news of Moore's sensational death, and having acquired a certain personal interest in spiritualism, I read it.

Following Mr. Terne's advice and my own inclination, I went straight home. No need to rehearse all I endured that day. Roberta's smilingly tearful consolations were the worst, I think, though, my father's: "Clay, son, you are right to stand by your friend!" ran a close second. He said it because I refused to hear a word against Nils, and insisted that the fault had not been his. Though I would not go into the details of what had taken place in Moore's library, I stuck at that one truth, and Dad, at least, who had taken a fancy to Nils the evening he dined at our house, believed me.

ALTOGETHER, however, it was a bad afternoon, and that night in my bedroom the face came again. I knew it was he, though the room was dark and I could not see him clearly. He had become so like as that to a material being!

"You have done well!" he began. "But, to make one small criticism, you must learn not to blush so easily. When your father commended your loyalty you reddened and stammered till, if you had not been among friends, suspicion might have been roused."

"My confusion only lasted a moment," I defended. Then I remembered. "You go!"

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I said. "What do I want of you and your criticisms or advice? You have brought me enough unhappiness. I am a sneak and a criminal, and all through you!"

"Ingratitude is the only real crime," he retorted sententiously. "Always be grateful, and show it! You have brought unhappiness on yourself, and it is I who point the way out. So far you have followed my advice. Why turn on me now?"

"Liar!" I fairly hissed. "If you can read my thoughts, you know that I have planned otherwise than you would have me! I am doing as Nils wished without regard to you, and not for the sake of myself. And let me tell you this! If there arises the slightest prospect that my friend will not be cleared, I shall confess. Tomorrow will decide it. If things go badly for him at the inquest, my people will have to suffer. The shame and loss he is trying to save them from would be nothing, then, to the shame involved by silence!"

Had the face possessed shoulders, I know he would have shrugged them.

"You are wrong, but we need not discuss that. I tell you in advance that your friend will be held for wilful murder. Did you know quite all that I know, you would not hope for a different indictment."

The strings of my heart contracted. I passed a breathless moment of realization. Then: "Tomorrow I confess!" I said firmly.

"Tomorrow you will choose a lawyer for your friend, and begin the work which will surely achieve his release."

"You do not know that! You have admitted that you are capable of mistakes."

"Not in a case of this kind. I possess a wide knowledge of facts which enables me to be very sure that your friend will get his release. I am your unswerving ally. And remember that I have not only wisdom, but some power."

"Oh, you are—leave me!" I cried aloud. "In God's name go!"

The faintly seen oval of his smooth face faded, though more slowly than in the cell at the station-house.

I heard a soft swish of slippered feet in the hall. Someone rapped lightly and opened my door.

"Clay, dear," said my mother, "did you call? Are you ill?"

"No. I had a bad dream and awoke crying out because of it."

"One can't wonder at that." She came and sat on the edge of my bed. "Such an awful thing for you to be involved in! Please, dear son, keep to your own class after this. Trouble always comes of mingling with queer Bohemian people who have no standards, or—or morals."

"Nils Berquist has the highest standard of any man I know!" I was fiercely defensive.

There was a pause of silence. Then in the dark she leaned and kissed my forehead. "You are so like him!" she murmured.

I groaned. "If only that were true!"

"But you are. With those blue, clear eyes of his, that saw only beauty and love. He would never hear a word against a friend."

"Mother! You meant that I am like—"

"Your uncle, yes. And in some strange way I feel sure that his guarding influence is really about us. Why, when I came into the room just now I had the queerest feeling—as if it were a room in a dream, or—no, I can't convey the feeling in words. But the sense of his presence was in it. I do truly believe that he has returned to guard us in the midst of so much trouble. At least, it would be like him. Dear, faithful, loving, lovable Serapion!"

BUT had my desired obsession, or familiar, or haunting ghost really desired to help, he might have warned me definitely of Sabina Cassel.

Alicia did not appear at the inquest. She was ill and under a physician's care. Her semi-conscious state as reported by him prevented even the taking of a deposition.

I did not, however, stand alone as star witness before the coroner's jury. Sabina Cassel, Mrs. Moore's old colored "Mammy" whom she had brought north with her from Virginia, shared and rather more than shared the honors with me.

They had taken pains that Nils and I should not meet. He was kept rigorously *incommunicado* till the inquest, no one, save the police and the district attorney, having access to him. At the inquest I caught only a glimpse of him, when he was led out past where I awaited my turn before the jury. Involuntarily I sprang up, only to be caught by a constable's hand, while Nils was hustled out. As he went, he threw me a glance that was a burning, dictatorial command.

I obeyed it. I told the jury exactly that story which Nils's letter had outlined for us both. There was tempered steel in Berquist.

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I could be sure that no long-drawn torment of inquisition could make him vary a hairsbreadth from the line he had set for us to follow.

In my testimony, which preceded Sabina's, I explained that Nils had objected to my interest in spiritualism, fostered by a single previous visit to the Moores' place. That he wished me to leave the house with him, and that Alicia also had seemed set against my remaining. That an argument ensued, at the height of which Moore became very angry and excited, shouted: "I'll settle with you, once for all!" and came around the table toward Berquist.

"He grasped Berquist's arm," I said. "When my friend tried to free himself, Moore snatched the—the file from the table. I saw Berquist seize Moore's wrist. They struggled a moment, and then Moore staggered away with his hands to his face. Then —he fell down. Berquist called to me, and— No, I had not tried to interfere. It all happened too quickly. There wasn't time. After Berquist wrenched the file from Moore's hand I don't believe he struck at Moore. I think the file was driven into his eye by an accident."

That surmise, of course, was struck from the record; but I had said it, at least, and hoped it impressed the jury.

"Afterward, the—the sight of blood and the suddenness of it all turned me sick—no, my recollections were clear up to that time."

And so forth. It was a straight story. I knew it agreed to a hair with Nils's confession.

What I did not, could not know, was that it varied in one essential detail from an entirely different confession—a confession made by a person whom we had not considered as an even possible eye-witness, and whose very existence I, at least, had forgotten.

Given that a second eye-witness existed, one would have supposed that the disagreement would have been over the slayer's identity. It was not. By a curious trick of fate, Sabina Cassel, Alicia's old colored maid, did undoubtedly see me strike Moore down, and yet, not through such a super-normal illusion as caused me to kill Moore, but in a perfectly natural manner, she had confused Berquist's identity with mine. She related as having been done by Berquist that which had been done by me.

In one detail only did Sabina's testimony conflict with ours, but that was the kind of detail which would hang a man, if its truth were established.

She had seen me—Berquist by her own account—snatch the file from the table and strike Moore, and she had seen me do it on no further provocation than the laying of Moore's hand on my arm.

The Fifth Presence was right when he foretold that Nils would be indicted.

And yet, though things had indeed gone ill for Nils at the inquest, I did not at once carry out my expressed intention and substitute myself for him as defendant.

I didn't wish to die, nor spend years in prison. I wanted to live and have a decent, straight, pleasant future ahead, such as I had been brought up to expect as a right. It seemed to me that just one way lay open. Though Nils was now entirely at my mercy, only his untrammeled acquittal would give me the moral freedom to keep silent. For that a first-class lawyer was an absolute necessity.

Berquist was practically penniless, and the Barbour exchequer in not much better state. Here again, however, friendship came to the fore in a curiously impressive manner. For the sake of an old acquaintance and some ancient friendly claim that my father had on him, none other than Helidore Mark, of Mark, Mark & Orlow, who could have termed himself Mark the famous and not lied.

I remember my first interview with him after dad had—to me almost incredibly—persuaded him into alliance. My first impression was of a mild-looking, smallish man, with a scrubby mustache. He had hurt the top of his bald head in some way, so that it was crossed with a fair-sized hillock of adhesive plaster. I thought that added to insignificant appearance; but he had the brightest, softly brown eyes I have ever seen, and after the first few minutes I was afraid of him.

I was afraid that I would tell him too much.

MY CONFIDENCE, however, proved not the easily uprooted kind of a common criminal, and for Nils the acquisition of this famous, insignificant looking lawyer gave me the only real hope of assurance I had through those bad days.

"Your friend," Mark had said to me, "is a rather wonderful young man, Barbour. I

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can't blame you for being troubled. He has the kind of intelligence that would make a legal genius of him, if he had turned his efforts in that direction. A wonderful intelligence—and all lost in a maze of impractical theorizing and the sort of dreams that can't come true so long as men are men, and women are women, Heaven help us all! He sha'n't go to the chair, nor prison, either. He's my man, my case, and—yes, I'll say my friend, though I don't run to sudden enthusiasm. Leave Berquist to me!"

Evidently, Mark's consultations with his "case" had not been kept within strictly professional bounds. I smiled involuntarily. I could picture that long dark face of Nils lighting to alert interest as he discovered that Mark was not merely the lawyer who might save him from martyrdom, but also a thinking man. He must have brought out a side of the little man that was kept carefully submerged at ordinary times. I am sure that few people had seen Helidore Mark inclined to dilatory wanderings in philosophy, such as Nils loved.

But I went out with a lighter heart and more optimism than I had carried in some time. Mark, with his "my man, my case—my friend!" had installed a confidence which remained with me all that day.

I had returned to the bank, for though I walked in the Valley of the Shadow, while I could walk I must work.

So Mr. Terne had me back again, and it was a very good thing that I had Mr. Terne to go back to. Not many men would have put up with the abstracted attention my work received, nor patiently picked up the slack of details I let go by me.

His patience had a characteristic reason behind it, which I was sure of from the minute he told me about poor Van.

The latter, it seemed, had really gone the step too far with his father in the affair of Mr. Terne's four hundred. Vansittart, Sr., would let no one speak of his son to him after that day. Everyone in the bank, however, knew that he had quarreled with him, disowned him, and that Van, in a fit of temper, had refused the offer of a last money settlement—a couple of thousand only, it was said—flung out of the Colossus, and walked off, leaving the gray roadster forlorn° by the curb.

No one knew where Van had gone after that. He had simply vanished, saying no goodbyes, and taking nothing with him but the clothes he wore.

Mr. Terne felt guilty because it was his complaint which had caused the final rupture. He liked me, anyway, but having, as he believed, ruined Van, he showed an added consideration for me which developed into an almost absurd tenderness for my feelings.

He needed that, if I was to be kept on the tracks at all those days. I was nervous as a cat, and ready to jump at the creak of a door.

Roberta would watch me with wide, troubled eyes, and because a question was in them I would grow irritable and fling off and leave her with almost brutal abruptness. And always she forgave me—till I came near wishing she would forgive less easily.

Cathy resented my new irritability with the merciless justice of a sister; mother endured my anxiety for Nils only because it proved I was like "dear Serapion," and dad harped on his pride in me for "standing by" till I really dreaded to go near him.

As for the Fifth Presence, he remained detestably faithful. Several times I explained to him that if Nils were not cleared I intended to confess. When he only continued to smile, I ceased talking to him.

He still came, however, and on the very night before the trial opened, the last thing of which I was conscious, dropping asleep, was his smooth, persuasive, hateful, silent voice. As ever, it was expressing the platitudinous—and always subtly evil—advice to which habit had so accustomed me that it had grown very hard indeed to distinguish his speech from my thoughts!

CHAPTER XI

SABINA'S TESTIMONY

WHEN a murderer—for I named myself that—is called to confront across some thirty feet of court-room the innocent man standing trial in his stead, he needs all his nerve and a bit more to keep steady under the questioning of even a friendly and considerate counsel.

In fact, I was strangely more afraid of Mark than of District Attorney Clemens. I might, however, have spared myself there.

The impaneling of the jury had been a battle-royal between Mark and Clemens, at which I was not present, but which had

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roused the newspaper men to gloating anticipation of the real battle to follow.

Then Mark became ill—dropped out!

I could hardly believe it when Orlow, his junior associate, met me on the first day of the trial, and broke the news. A brain tumor caused by the injury.

Had it not been for Mark, I told myself, I would never have let Nils Berquist go to trial. Should I allow it to go on now, with our best hope *hors de combat*?

The second Mark—Helidore's brother—was in Europe, and Orlow, while brilliant in his fashion, was not a man to impress juries. His genius lay in the hunting out of technical refinements of law, ammunition, as it were, for the batteries which had brought rage to the heart of more than one district attorney.

When he arose presently in court and asked for a delay in proceedings, Clemens's eye lighted. When Mr. Justice Ballington refused the request—a foregone conclusion, because Mark, admittedly, was in too serious a condition for the delay even to be measured—Clemens lowered his head suddenly. It might have been grief for his adversaries' misfortune—or, again, it might not.

Where I sat with other witnesses, I was intensely conscious of an absurd, brilliantly veiled little figure, two chairs behind me.

This was my first glimpse of Alicia, since the night of Berquist's arrest. Though I knew Mark had been granted at least two interviews with her, me she had resolutely refused to receive.

Now I was relieved to find that her nearness brought no return of the supernormal influence I had suffered before in her vicinity.

She sat stiffly upright, and did not glance once in my direction. Perhaps her "guides" had advised her to don that awful veil of protecting purple for this occasion; or she may have worn it as a tribute to her husband's memory. It certainly gave her a more unusual appearance than would a crape blackness behind which a newly made widow is wont to hide her grief.

At her side towered the large form of Sabina Cassel.

The trial opened.

One Dr. Frick appeared on the stand, and in elaborate incomprehensibility described in surgical terms the wound which had caused Moore's death. I saw him handling a small, hideous object—gesturing with it to show exactly how it had been misused to a deadly purpose.

Then for several minutes I didn't see anything more. Luckily all eves in the courtroom were on either the doctor or the "murderer." Nobody was watching me.

The doctor's demonstration seemed to prove rather conclusively that my "accident" hypothesis was impossible. The file, he showed, could have been driven into the brain only by a direct blow.

Dr. Frick was allowed to stand down.

In establishing the offense, Clemens saw fit to call Alicia herself.

As her mistress arose, Sabina's massive bulk stirred uneasily, as if she would have followed her to the stand.

At the inquest, the old colored woman's testimony had done more than cause Nils's indictment for murder. It had made a public and very popular jest of Alicia's claim to intercourse with "spirits." But though, in the first flush of excitement over Moore's death, Sabina had betrayed her, the woman was loyal to her mistress. When a murmur that was almost a titter swept the packed audience outside the rail. Sabina shook her head angrily, muttering to herself.

The audience hoped much of Alicia, and its keen humor was not entirely disappointed. No sooner had she appeared than an argument began about her preposterously brilliant veil. The court insisted that it should be raised. Alicia firmly declined to oblige. She had to give in finally, of course, and when that peaked, white face with its strange eyes was exposed, the hydra beyond the rail doubtless felt further rewarded.

The hydra believed her a fraud. They had reason. I, with greater reason, understood and pitied her!

I thought she might break down on the stand. Alicia's character, however, was a complicated affair that set her outside the common run of behavior. To Clemens' questions she replied with sphinx-like impassivity and the precision of a machine.

Her answers only confirmed Nils's story and mine to a certain point, and stopped there. There was not a word of "spirits" nor "guides"; not a hint of any influence more evil than common human passions; not a suggestion, even that she had formed an opinion as to which man, slayer or slain, was the first aggressor. I am sure that a more reserved and non-committal widow

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than Alicia never took the stand at the trial of her husband's supposed murderer.

"James," she said, "wished Mr. Barbour to remain. Mr. Berquist wished him to leave. They argued— No, I should not have called the argument a quarrel— I did not see Mr. Berquist strike James. While they were talking I lost consciousness of material surroundings— Yes, my loss of consciousness could be called a faint— The argument was not violent enough to frighten me into fainting— Yes, there was a reason for my losing consciousness— I lost consciousness because I felt faint. I was tired— I do that sometimes. Yes, I warned them that something bad was coming. I couldn't say why. I just had that impression. I did not see either James or Mr. Berquist assume a threatening attitude—"

Released at last, she readjusted her purple screen with cold self-possession, and returned to her seat.

IT WAS Sabina Cassel's next turn. Save in appearance, Alicia had not after all come up to public anticipations. In Sabina, however, the hydra was sure of a real treat in store.

Judge Ballington rapped for order. Sabina took her oath with a scowl. Every line of her face expressed resentment.

But she was intelligent. To Clemens's questions, she gave grim, bald replies that offered as little grip as possible to public imagination.

Yes, on the evening in question she had been standing concealed behind the black curtains of "Miss 'Licia's" cabinet, or "box," as Sabina called it. No, "Marse James" did not know she was there. Miss 'Licia and she had "fixed it up" so that one could enter the box from the back. Marse James had the box built with a solid wooden back, like a wardrobe. It stayed that way—for a while.

"Then Marse James he done got onsatisfied!— Yas, de sperits did wuhk in de box an' come out ob it, too; but Marse James, he ain't suited yit. He want dem sperits shud wuhk all de time! He neber gib mah poh chile no res'!"

And so Alicia, who, according to Sabina, could sometimes but not always command her "sperits," devised a means to satiate Moore's scientific craving for results.

While he was absent in another city, the two conspirators brought in a carpenter. They had the cabinet removed and a doorway cut through the plastered wall into a large closet in the next room. By taking off the cabinet's solid back and hinging it on again, it would just open neatly into the aperture cut to fit it. Alicia kept plenty of gowns hung over the opening in the closet beyond.

Returning, Moore found his solid-backed cabinet apparently as before. From that time, however, the "sperits" were more willing to oblige than formerly.

"*Ab uno disce omnes,*" is invariably applied to the medium or clairvoyant caught in fraud, though translated: "From all fraud, infer all deceit."

The world laughed over the "spiritualistic fake again exposed!" I did not laugh.

Let it be that the hand which Roberta and I had seen was Sabina's gnarled black paw, and that my impression of its unsubstantiality was a self-delusion. Let those strange little twirling flames that had arisen pass as the peculiar "fireworks" I had tried to believe them. Let even the incident of the broken lamp have been a feat of Sabina's —though how her large, clumsy figure could have stolen out past the table and into the room unheard was a puzzle—and the masculine voice of "Horace," a wonderful ventriloquism.

Grant all these as deceptions. There had come that to me through Alicia's unwilling agency which had given me a terrible faith in her, that no proof of occasional fraud could dispel.

Clemens's interrogations touched lightly on the object of the door in the cabinet's supposedly solid back, only serving to establish the fact that it was impossible for his witness to have been practically in the library unknown to all the room's other occupants save, probably, Alicia.

Then he asked Sabina's story of that night in her own words. She began it grimly:

"Waal, Ah wuz in behin' de cuhtins dat hangs in front ob Miss 'Licia's box. Dem cuhtins is moderate thin. Ah cudn' see all dey is in de room, but Ah suttinly cud see all dat pass in front ob de lamp— Yass, dat whut yoh got in yoh hand am one ob dem cuhtins."

Here Clemens checked her, while the "cuhtin," was passed from hand to hand through the jury-box. Each juryman momentarily draped himself in mourning while he assured himself that it was thin enough to be seen through. Then with solemn nods

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Exhibit B was restored to the district attorney. Sabina continued.

"Dese yeah gemmen, Mistah Buhquis' and Mistah Bahbour, dey come in, and right away de argifyin' stahted. Ah kain't tell all dey say. Dey use high-falutin', eddicated languidge what am not familiar toh me, though Lawd knows Ah's done hear enuff ob it sence Miss 'Licia come norff wif Marse James Mooah.

"Dey argifies an' argifies. Mistah Bahbour, he don't say nuffin' much. But Mistah Buhquis', he specify dey shud bof up'n leave. Miss 'Licia she say mebbe sump'n bad gwine happen purty quick. Marse James, he say: 'Mistah Bahbour, you go; come back 'notha time.' Mistah Bahbour, he say no, he doan wanta go, kaze Miss 'Licia c'n mebbe help him some way. Mistah Buhqus' he go right up in de aih. He specify some hahm done come ob he fren' stayin' roun' deah any longah.

"Mistah Buhquis' he am standin' right alondside de big table wif de lamp on it. De lamp am behin' him. I see ebery move he make.

"He done muttah sump'n low. Ah don't rightly know whut he say, but it hab a right spiteful, argifyin' tone to it.

"Marse James, he holler out: 'I fix yoh now foh dat!' an' he rush obah to Mistah Buhquis' an' lay han' on he arm— No, suh; he didn't go foh to do Mistah Buhquis' no hahm. Marse James he hab a way ob talkin' loud an' biggety, but Ah nevah done saw him do no hahm to nobuddy.

"He grab Mistah Buhquis' lef' arm. Mistah Buhquis', he reach out he otha' han' and grab sump'n off de table. Marse James don' do nuffin'. Mistah Buhquis,' he fro back he han' an' hit out wif it real smaht. Marse James leggo de ahm, clap he han's obah he face, an' sorta lets go all obah. He jes' crumble down lak.

"Ah knows dat de bad am happen.

"Ah cuddin' git out dat box easy into de room, kaze dey's a table in it dat reach purty nigh acrost, an' Ah ain't spry to climb ober it— No, suh; Ah didn't think to shuv de table out de way. Ah cain't think ob nuffin' but Miss 'Licia. Ah turns roun' an' gits out de back, kaze Ah wants to git to mah Miss 'Licia. Ah comes roun' to de hall and goes in de library. Deah is Mistah Buhquis' stannin' obah Marse James, he han's all droppin' blood.

"Ah say: 'Yo' done kill him, ain't yoh?' He luks all roun' kinda pitiful lak, an' then he say:

" 'Yas, Sabina; Ah kill him! Now go fotch de dōctah an' some p'leece!'

"Mistah Buhquis', he am lak lots ob otha high-spirited gemmen. He don't go foh to kill Marse James, but when Marse James tech him in anger, he jes' bleeged foh to do it. Das all right! Ah gotta right to hab mah 'pinion, same as ebryone. Waal, don't put it in de writin' record, den. Ah don' keer whut yoh does. Das jes' mah 'pinion!

"Yas suh. Ah's suah dat it war Mistah Buhquis' grab de file and not Marse James. Wall, Marse James, he stannin' wif he lef' side to de table. Yas, suh; I cud suah nuff tell which wuz which. Marse James, he ain't so tall by purty nigh a fut high as Mistah Buhquis'. It am de tall man who stan' wif de right side ag'in' de table who take de file off'n it. No; Marse James don' try ter do nuffin hurtful to Mistah Buhquis'. No; dey don' struggle roun' none atall. Dey jes' stan' deah. It's de Lawd's truf, dat was de mos' onexcitin' killin' Ah hab evah saw!"

And then Clemens let her go, to the deep disgust of Hydra, outside the rail. He had not asked what she was doing in the cabinet, nor many other of the questions which gave an amusing double interest to the Moore murder. All that, however, was bound to come out in the cross-examination, and, meantime, Sabina had proved "Clemens' witness" to an extent which made the case promise well of interest on its tragic side.

I WAS not called before the jury until after the noon recess, which gave me time to think things over a bit more.

At the inquest, I had not actually heard Sabina's testimony. Though Mark, who interviewed her as well as her mistress, had warned me that she would prove a difficult antagonist, I had not fully believed him. Negroes in the average run are diffuse in their statements and easily muddled into self-contradiction.

Sabina might prove so under cross-examination, but I doubted it now. She had wasted hardly a word that morning, and there was only one point on which I was sure that she could be shaken.

The difference in height between slayer and slain was a strong point for the prosecution. Even through thin, black curtains it would indeed have been hard to confuse a

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tall silhouette with a short one. But no one had thought to question the identity of the tall silhouette.

Though Sabina may have known better during the minutes that she stood staring through the curtains, her after and more vivid sight of Berquist, hands "dropping blood," and his almost instant claim of the crime as his own, had served to make the tall man Berquist in all her memories.

Berquist, the self-confessed!

I had no faith in Orlow. Had Mark not dropped out, I should have been content to let the trial take its course, sure that his genius would somehow save the day and free my friend. But under Orlow's handling, with that craggy, sullen, assured black woman to swear that Moore was not and could not have been the aggressor—since he stood with his left side to the table, grasping the tall silhouette with his right hand, and a man under impulse of passion is not likely to reach for a weapon with his left—I was morally certain that Berquist would lose out.

But what if, rising on the stand, instead of a second perjury I told the simple truth?

Not that portion of it which included the superhuman, but just the fact that I, and not Berquist, had been swept by one of those sudden fits of red anger that have made murderers of many before me?

Why, Sabina herself would support my words, once spoken! There was a little, unnoticed twist in her testimony—a point where the voice of Berquist, coming from beyond the table, became the voice of the tall man standing on her side of the lamp.

The instant that I spoke she would know. Her memories, unconsciously readjusted to fit facts as she had afterward learned them, would be straight again. Berquist's hidden heroism would stand revealed, and I, though I died, I would at least die clean.

Resolve crystallized suddenly within me. When Clemens called me to the stand I would go, not to testify, but to confess.

I WALKED to the little raised platform, with the chair where the others had sat, below the double tier of jurymen. I mounted it. Somebody put a dusty black book under my hand and mumbled through a slurred rigmarole, to which my low acquiescence was a prelude to ruin for me. I sat down in the chair.

Beyond the rail was a packed level of faces. They were all pale and dreary-looking, it seemed to me, though that may have been an effect of light, for the day was gray and dreary. I had returned to court through falling snow. It was a wet, late spring fall of clinging flakes, and all the way I had been haunted by a memory of the "dead-alive" house as I had seen it that night.

Not the interior—not even the library, with its master, a grim gray and scarlet horror on the floor. But the house itself, desolate under its white burden, with the great flakes swirling down, hiding deeper and more deep the line of division between the living half and the dead.

Berquist was sitting by a table with Orlow beside him. I had visited him in prison, of course, and talked with him a few moments just before the trial opened. His determination and c o u r a g e had never swerved, nor his conviction that we had only to keep steady—and win.

Now I saw his eyes as a dark and valiant glory fixed on me. Their message only hardened my resolve. That man to play the martyr for my sake? Never!

Orlow left Nils, and took his stand conveniently near. He was there to protect me from irrelevant questions, but he looked quite out of place. Clearly, the mantle of Helidore Mark did not rest easily on his shoulders.

The district attorney, a thin, scholarly person whom I instinctively disliked, began his inquisition.

"Your name, please? Age and occupation?"

"Barbour—Clayton S. Barbour," I corrected myself. "I am—"

"Just a moment. Your full name for the record, please, Mr. Barbour."

Clemens, who would reserve any attempt to "rattle" me for my appearance in the rebuttal, was politeness itself.

"Clayton—*Serapion* Barbour!" I forced out. Then I cursed myself for not having substituted "Samuel," or left out the initial.

"There's power in a name." Once I would have laughed at that statement, but not now. Not with my recent memories.

And as God is my witness, I sat there and saw the district attorney's hatchet-face change, blend, grow smooth and loathsomely pleasant.

Clemens continued his interrogations, but I spoke to another than he when I answered them.

The living bound by the dead!

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CHAPTER XII

A LETTER FROM ALICIA

May 15

Mr. C. S. Barbour.

Sir: I am writing to you because my guides advise it. Otherwise I should not do so. I have returned to my old home in Virginia. The newspapers were very cruel to me, as you know, and everyone unkind and harsh and disbelieving.

James understood me. If he had found out about the cabinet, he would have been annoyed, but he would only have taken more pains after that to see that *all* the phenomena were genuine. I can't help doing such things. It is a part of my nature. James said I was very complex.

In a measure, it is your fault that he left me. I am not vengeful, however, and I do not hold it against you, because I can very well guess at what you had to contend with. For some cause that has not been revealed to me—some cause within yourself, I fear—you were and still are peculiarly open to the attack of *one we know of*.

Were your an ordinary case of obsession, I might have helped. As it is, I can only offer warning. Whatever there is in you that answers to *him*, choke it—crush it back—give it no headway. Above all, do not obey him. If, as I suspect, you have obeyed in the past, cease now. It is not yet too late. But if June 9 finds you under his domination you will never be free again.

You may wonder why I was silent at the trial. You may have thought that I was ignorant of the truth. This is not so, though I did not even tell Sabina. To bring the greater criminal to justice was impossible. For the rest, it was between you and your friend.

Understand, I will not interfere between you and your friend.

My guides say that this is not for me to do. That I must not. That if one of you wills to sacrifice and the other to accept, not even God will interfere between you.

But I write particularly to give this message.

Mortal life is cheap, and mortal death an illusion. Beyond and deeper are Life and Death eternal. Be careful which you choose.

Alicia Moore

CHAPTER XIII

A CONVERSATION

"PLAIN life and death are the only realities. Life eternal—death eternal! For you and me, those are words, my boy—just words!"

It was dusk in my room. I sat on the edge of the bed, chin in hands, staring at the inevitable companion of my solitude. At my feet lay the scattered sheets of Alicia's letter, scrawled over in a large, childish hand. The outside world was bright with an afterglow of the departed sun. But gray dusk was in my room.

"Just words," repeated the face.

"Just words," I said after him dully. Then, at a thought, I roused a trifle. "He won't go through with it. Even Nils Berquist can't be willing to die without a protest—and for such a crawling puppy as would let him do it!"

"He will die, but not entirely for your sake," the presence retorted.

"What do you mean?"

"You haven't guessed? Well, it is rather amusing from one viewpoint. Your friend is not only in jail; he's in love!"

"Nils? Nonsense! Besides, if he were in love he would wish to live, not die!"

"That is the amusing part. He is willing to die, because of the love."

"Some woman refused him, you mean?"

"No; the girl is not even aware of his feeling toward her. She would, I think, be shocked at the very thought. He has only spoken with her twice in his life. But from the first moment that he saw her face he has loved her. He has sat in the courtroom and watched her while the lawyers fought over his life, and to his peculiar nature—rather an amusingly peculiar nature, from our viewpoint—merely watching her so has seemed a privilege beyond price. He is willing to die, not for you, but to buy her happiness."

"Who is this girl?" I asked hoarsely, and speaking aloud as I still sometimes did with him.

"You should know."

"Nils Berquist—in love—with Roberta?" I said slowly. "But that's absurd! You are lying!"

"No. Every day, as you know, she was in that audience beyond the rail. For your sake. Because she knew how you cared for this man Berquist. She herself has a shrinking horror of the 'red-handed murderer,' but her devotion to you has served our purpose well. That first mere glimpse he had of her on the street—the hour at dinner in your house—these impressions might have somewhat paled in the stress of confronting so disgraceful a form of death. But in the courtroom he watched her face for hours every day, and each day bound our dear poet and dreamer tighter."

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"But—"

"He measures her love for you by his own for her. As you are his friend still, uncondemned and worthy, he will buy your life for her."

"He loves her—and would have her marry a murderer?"

"He believes as you have told him, and truly enough, that you were thrown off balance by some influence connected with Alicia and did not know what you were doing. But it is rather amusing, as I said. He loves the girl for the goodness and purity of her beauty, and for her newly born sadness. You have tired of her for the same reasons, and plan to break the engagement. But he needn't know that, eh?"

"Liar! I shall marry Roberta."

"When? Never! No; you are entirely right. She is not the wife for you. With my help you can easily attract a better. I know at least one woman among your mother's friends who is already devoted to you, and who has means to make not only you but your whole family happy and comfortable. I mean the blond widow, who owns the big house next to your old home. What is her name? Marcia Baird. Yes; she is the woman I refer to. Oh, I knew she's over thirty, but think what she could give you. As for the girl, she knows your circumstances. Her love is selfish, or she would have released you before this."

"You are lying, as you have lied in the past."

"What have I said that proved untrue?"

"You have lied from the first. There was poor old Van. You said that his father would forgive him, and he didn't."

"Be fair. You misquote. I said that Van would not be ruined. With the enthusiastic despair of youth, he played hobo for a while. Then he went to work at the one thing he understood. He is a very industrious mechanic now in an automobile factory, with good chances of a foremanship, and—except for grease—living cleaner than he ever did before. He was going the straight down road, but his sacrifice for you pulled him up. You will hear from him shortly. He doesn't bear you any grudge."

"You promised to be my ally; to use your power as an influence to help."

"I kept the promise. Has the least slur of suspicion fallen upon you? Is not everyone your friend? Is there a man or woman living who hates or despises you? Are you

"Always—always, here and hereafter, indissolubly bound"

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not shielded and sheltered by the mantle of love, as I foretold?"

"But you promised that Nils would be acquitted."

"Not acquitted. I said released. For such a spirit as his, this world is a prison. In real life, such as you and I prize, there is no contentment for him. Death will release him to that higher sphere where the idealist finds perfection, and the dreamer his dreams. Believe me, Nils Berquist could never be happy on earth. In speeding his departure, we are really his benefactors—you and I."

The face beamed as though in serene joy for the good we had done together; but I hid my head in my arms, groaning for the shame of us both.

June 9 was coming. *June 9.*

CHAPTER XIV

TWO LETTERS

June 5

My Dear Clayton:

Mother has told me of your talk with her. I am glad to learn that your views coincide with my own, as I have felt for some time that it would be best for me to release you from our engagement. Your ring and some gifts I return by the messenger who carries this. I am leaving shortly on a visit to friends of mother's in the South, so we shall not meet again soon. Wishing you the best of fortune in all ways, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Roberta Ellsworth Whitingfield.

June 5

My Own Dearest—Here and Hereafter:

Mother didn't understand as I do. She made me write the letter that goes with this. She is very proud, and that you should be the one who wished to break our engagement shamed her. She even believed a silly gossip that you have been paying court to Mrs. Marcia Baird on the sly! I had to laugh a little. Imagine it! If I could picture you as disloyal, I could never, I'm sure, picture you making love to that poor, dear, sentimental, rich Mrs. Baird, who is old enough to be the mother of us both. Well, maybe not quite that, but awfully old. Thirty-five, anyway.

But mother half believed it, and to please her I wrote that cold, hard letter that goes with this.

I'm not proud a bit, dearest. I have to tell you that I understand. You are burdened to the breaking-point; but it is I whom you wish to free, not yourself. Dearest, I don't want that kind of freedom. Love is sacrifice. Don't you know that I could wait for you a lifetime, if needs be? Mother says you never truly loved me, or you would not let me go. I know better. We are each other's only, you and I. I measure your love for me by mine for you, and, if it's years or a lifetime, be sure that I shall wait.

You have suffered so over this terrible tragedy of your friend that I can't bear you to have even a little pain from doubt of me. It seems dreadful that I should leave you on the very day before—before June 9. But mother has bought the tickets and made all the arrangements, so I must go. I won't hurt you by saying a word against your friend; but, oh, my dearest, don't quite break that heart I love over a tragedy that, after all, isn't yours. You have been to him all that a friend could be. True—loyal—self-sacrificing. You could not have done or suffered more if he had been your brother. That's one reason I am sure of you, dearest. No man who could be so loyal to friendship will ever forget his love.

I promised mother not to see you again, but nothing was said about letters! I'll send you an address later. Clay, darling, goodbye till you are free to take me.

Remember—years or a lifetime!

Your own dearest always, here and hereafter,

Bert

(*Extract from Evening Bulletin:*)

June 8

. . . Truck collides with taxi on Thirty-Second Street. Miss Roberta Whitingfield victim of fatal accident. . . . Early this morning a heavy truck, loaded with baggage, skidded across a bit of wet asphalt on Thirty-Second Street, and collided with the rear of a taxicab traveling in the same direction. The taxi was hurled against the curb. . . . One of the occupants uninjured . . . daughter, Miss Roberta Whitingfield taken to St. Clement's Hospital . . . death ensued shortly afterward. . . Miss Whitingfield said to have been the fiancée of Clayton S Barbour, a witness in the famous Moore murder trial, and who has since vainly exerted himself to obtain a pardon for the murderer, Berquist. . . . If the victim of this morning's accident is really Mr. Barbour's betrothed wife, there is a tragic coincidence here for him. No one has ever questioned his devoted and disinterested friendship for the socialist murderer, Berquist. His friend dies tomorrow. Has his sweetheart died today?

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CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER CONVERSION

"CLAY! Lad, you're the one person on earth whom I wished to see!"

"You've changed your mind, Nils? You'll let me tell them the truth?"

"Hush! Speak lower, and be careful. How long have we to talk?"

"Twenty minutes. I wrung a pass at last from Clemens. Thought I could never have persuaded him. You know what a time I had over the last one, and now—so close to the day! Unheard of, the warden said; but I had the pass. They searched me and let me in. If I'd failed it might have been better for you, Nils!"

"Why?"

"If I'd failed, I had meant to confess immediately—"

"Hush, I say! The others there seem inattentive enough, but you can't gage how closely they are listening. A prison is more than a prison. I've learned that. It's a mesh of devilish traps, set to comb the very soul out of a man and violate its secrecy."

"Nils, you have suffered too much!"

"Don't go so white, lad. It was good in you to come and see me again."

"Nils!"

"I mean it. Don't you think I understand what this means to you? Have I no imagination? Can't I put myself in your place? Why, the last time you came it nearly broke my heart to remind you of your duty! But we are men, you and I. When men love they are willing to make their sacrifice."

"You would not do this for me alone? It is all for Roberta?"

"Can you ask? Why, dear friend, I would never damn you to a lifetime of remorse for a lesser reason. My part is nothing. To die is nothing. We all die. If you could exchange with me, I might not survive you a day—an hour. There are so many doors out beside the one I pass through tomorrow. What's death? No, boy, it is your part that is hard. And I thanked God when I saw your face, because I wished to say a word or so that might make it easier."

"You are the noblest friend a man ever had. But I came to tell you that—that—have you seen the afternoon papers?"

"No, nor any papers for a week. I'm done with this world and the news of it. I hadn't supposed, though, that they would devote their precious columns to real gloatings over me till tomorrow. Clay, take my advice and don't read the papers of June 9."

"You—haven't seen—today's?"

"I say, no! Why? Any special gloatings in them?"

"There is—Nils, you must let me stop this while there is time. I shall go to the Governor—"

"No! No—no—no, and no, again! Clay, have I passed through months of hell to see my reward snatched away at the last instant? There! You see, I make it plain that I'm selfish! To keep *her* happiness inviolate—to buy happiness for her at the mere price of death—why, that's a joy that I never believed God would judge me worthy of!"

"You believe in God and His justice? You?"

"Most solemnly—most earnestly—as I never knew Him nor His justice before, Clayton, lad. Why, I'm happy! Do I seem so tragically sad to you?"

"No. But you seem different from any living man. You look like—I have seen the picture of a man with that light on His face."

"So?"

"He was nailed to a cross. Nils! I am afraid!"

"I said your part was hardest. Hush! The others are listening. We've been speaking too loudly. Our time is almost gone, and I haven't even begun what I wished to say. Quick! Make me two promises. You're the friend I have loved, Clay. I'd stake anything on your word. First, I am buying your life with all that I have to give. So it's mine, isn't it?"

"You—you know!"

"Yes. Straighten up, boy. They are watching us. Your life, then, which is mine, I will and bequeath to—her. And you will never forget. That's a promise?"

"Y-yes. Nils, I can't stand this! I have a thing to tell you—"

"Hush! Second, never by word nor look, never, if you can help it, by a thought in her presence, will you betray our secret. A promise?"

"Nils—no—yes! *I promise.*"

"And you will—"

"Is that the guard coming?"

"I fear so. Our last talk is over, Clay. Don't care too much. Wait—just a minute

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more, guard. What, five? They are good to me, these last days. Listen, Clay:

"You are the only man in the world to whom I would tell this. This morning—a wonderful dream came to me. I had lain awake all night thinking, and I was tired. After breakfast I lay down again. I lay there on my cot, asleep, but I believed waking. And *she* came and stood by my head. You know that time when we met at dinner in your house, she didn't like me very well. And afterward, in the court-room, as time passed and they proved their case, she—before the end she dreaded to even look toward me.

"Don't protest. It's true. But in this dream that was so much more real than reality she stood there and smiled, Clay—at me! She laid her hand on my forehead. There was a faint light around her. And she leaned and kissed me—on the lips. Waking, I still felt the touch of her lips. So real—real! If she were not living, I would have sworn that her spirit had come to me. And friendly—loving.

"Don't look so, Clay! I shouldn't have told you—oh surely you don't grudge me that kindliness from her—in a dream? There, I knew you too well to think it! All right, guard, he's coming.

"Clay, goodbye! May your sacrifice measure your happiness, as God knows it does mine. When you think of me, let it be only as a friend—always—forever—here and hereafter! Goodbye!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE REWARD

I WALKED into a dusty-green triangle of turfed and gravel-walked space, smitten with hot, yellow light from the west, where the June sun sank slowly down a clear, light-blue sky. Behind me across a narrow street rose the stark, gray wall beyond which a certain man would never pass into the sunshine again.

He is in the shadow; I am in the sun.

But sunlight was yellow, glaring, terrible. In the prison I had longed for it. The shadow had seemed bad then. Now I learned how worse than bad was midnight.

There were three rusty iron benches set in the triangle, and they were all empty. No one wished to sit there. There would be always the risk that some sneak and murderer might come walking out of that prison across the way; walking out, leaving his friend and his honor and his God behind him forever.

So I walked into the little triangle and sat down on one of the empty benches.

I had with me two papers. I had meant—I think I had meant to show at least one of them to Nils. When I went to the prison I had not known whether Nils would have read or been told a certain piece of news. If he had not already learned, it was in my despairing mind to tell him and let him decide what we should do.

I had found him ignorant and left him so.

Sitting there on the empty bench in the hot, free, terrible sunshine, I drew one of the papers from my pocket. I wished to see if this were true; if a certain quarter-column of cheap, blurred print did really exist, and if it conveyed exactly the information I had read there.

Yes, there the thing was. The slanting sun beat so hot on the paper that it seemed to burn my hands. I sat on an iron bench in a dusty triangle of green. I had come out of the place where Nils Berquist awaited death, I held a folded newspaper in my hands, and I was beyond question a damned soul. All these things were facts—real.

My eyes followed the print.

"Miss Roberta Whitingfield—death ensued shortly afterward—said to have been the fiancée of Clayton S. Barbour—who has since vainly exerted himself to obtain a pardon for the murderer, Berquist. No one has ever questioned his devoted and disinterested friendship for the socialist murderer, Berquist. His friend dies tomorrow. Has his sweetheart died today?"

I was better informed than the reporter. Not my sweetheart, but my former sweetheart had died today. My victim, not my friend, would die tomorrow.

The second paper that I carried was not printed, but written. Taking it out I tore it up very carefully, into tiny bits of pieces. Just so I had destroyed Nils's letter, sent me by the bribed guard at the station-house, and also the quaint, strange letter of Alicia Moore.

The pieces I tossed into the air. They fell on the hot, dry grass like snowflakes, and lay still. There wasn't even a breath of wind to carry them or scatter them. And the words they had borne I couldn't very well tear up, nor forget.

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"We are each other's only, you and I. No man who could be so loyal to friendship will ever forget his love. Your own dearest always, here and hereafter."

"No," I said aloud very thoughtfully. "Not always. Not—beyond the border. She came to him in a dream, so real—real! And kissed him. Well, they must see clearer, over there. Nils will see clearer tomorrow."

"But, thank God," said a pleasant, silent voice, "for the blindness of living men!"

"Are you never going to leave me?" I asked dully.

"Never," the face replied. "You are mine and I am yours. You settled that a few minutes ago in the prison. You clinched it irrevocably with the destruction of her letter. But don't be downhearted. I've an idea we shall get on excellently together."

"Go!" I said, but without hope that the face would obey me. Nor did he.

"You would find yourself very lonely if I should go. There will never again be any other comrade for you than myself. And yet I can promise you many friends and lovers. Berquist is not the last idealist alive on earth, nor was she who died the last woman who could love. But you and I understand one another. True comradeship requires understanding, and such as Nils Berquist and the girl, though they offer us their devotion, can never give understanding to you and me. This, when you think of it, is fortunate."

"In the name of God, leave me!"

"Never! Save as a careless word, what have you and I to do with God? We are each other's only," it insisted, the pleasant, horrible face. "Always—always—here and hereafter, indissolubly bound!"

And with that, instead of fading out as was its custom, the face came toward me swiftly. I did not stir. It was against my own face, and I could see it no longer, for it and I were one.

Rising, I walked out of the little, hot triangle of green, and as I had left Nils Berquist in his prison, so I left a newspaper on the bench; some tiny scraps of white paper to litter the dusty grass.

ALL that happened many years ago; long enough for even the restlessness to have forgotten, one would think. And I am content—successful. Moreover, I am well liked in the world, which means a lot to me, who to be content must be loved.

Just now, alone in my room, I viewed myself in a mirror. The face that looked back was familiar enough; as familiar, or rather more so, than my own soul. I myself liked it.

Smooth, young-looking for a man near forty; pleasant—above all else pleasant—with a little inward twist at the corners of the finely cut mouth, and an amused but wholly agreeable slyness to the clear, light-blue eyes.

Not romantic. Romance is only another word for idealism, and that face has no ideals of its own. Yet so many romantic people have loved it! As I looked, my mind drifted back over the long, dear, self-sacrificing, idealistic line of those who have borne my burdens and made my life easy and enjoyable.

Away down, pressed back in the very depths of my being, a pang of horror gnawed; but I have grown used to that. That wasn't I. I was—I am—that face which returned my gaze from the mirror.

It is true that left to himself the boy, Clayton, might never have dared take that which so many people in this good old world are ready to offer to one who does dare; who is not afraid to be the god above their altar. But what harm to the devotees? That sort get their own happiness so. They like to sacrifice themselves and, to change the simile, they love their crucifier. They suffer, endure perhaps, like Nils Berquist, all shame, and the final agony of death. And God sends them a dream, and they are content!

I understand that. Why not? It is because I have strength to be what they are if I chose that I have such strength in being what I am. I am content in my own fashion, which suits me, and the restlessness should learn to be content in the same manner.

Let it be quiet now. I have written the story; I, Clayton Barbour, the successful, the loved, the happy—

What, still restless and torn with horror? Then bring out the whole truth if you must, and be quiet after!

What has been written was the story of Clayton Barbour; but it is I whom he has tormented into writing it for him!

Yes, I, the pleasant, crafty usurper; I, the ignoble hypocrite to myself and God; I, the self-ridden outcast of happiness in any world; the eternal and accursed sham; the

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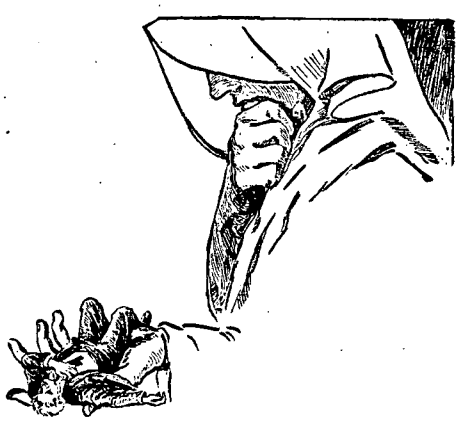
acceptor of sacrifice, the loved, the damned, the angel-drowned-in-mire, Serapion!

I have absorbed his being; yes! But in the very face of victory I, who never had a conscience, have paid a bitter price for the new lease of life in the flesh that I coveted. Body and soul you yielded to me, Clayton Barbour; body and soul, I took you, and thence onward forever, body and soul, in spirit or flesh, we two are indissolubly bound.

And my punishment is this: that you are not content, and I know now that you never will be. Year by year you, who were weak have grown stronger; day by day, even hour by hour, you are tightening the grip that draws me into your own cursed circle of conscience-stricken misery.

Sooner or later—ah, but the very writing of this gives you power! Is it true, then? After all these years must the long, bright shadow of Nils Berquist's cross touch and save me even against my will? Must I, Clayton-Serapion, the dual soul made one, surrender at last and myself take up the awful burden God lays on those he loves?

First painful step on that road, I have confessed



A. Merritt on Modern Witchcraft

This letter, which appeared in The Argosy shortly before the original publication of "Burn, Witch, Burn!" in 1932, is of deep interest to readers of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.

It throws some light on the viewpoint of the writer of that great devil-doll story which appeared in F. F. M.'s June issue. And it also is pertinent to another fine witchcraft yarn which is coming next month—"Creep, Shadow!", authored by this same genius of fantastic literature.

HAVE I ever had any actual experiences in the *terra incognita* of science which we call witchcraft? Yes, several. I will give you one instance. Years ago I was in a district peopled by sturdy German farmer-folk whom we in Philadelphia called the "Pennsylvania Dutch." They still believe in many of the legends of their forefathers and the "Wild Huntsman" rides the storms of their mountains as he rides the Hartz in Germany. I was making a certain investigation; autos were less plentiful than now and I was riding a horse. I became benighted about twenty miles north of Lebanon and sought shelter in a comfortable looking farmhouse. I was tired and went to bed early. The farmer showed me to my room and told me not to be disturbed by any sounds I might hear, that one of his daughters had been "hexed," that is, bewitched, and that the "hex-doctor" was coming in to remove the spell.

Naturally I asked if I might be present. He hesitated, went out obviously to consult someone, and returning told me I could if I would keep silent and "kneel when they knelt." I agreed. About ten o'clock the big kitchen began to fill with men and women. There was a big table

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in the center and on the side a bunk, or rather built-in bed with a sliding panel, which when pulled over shut the bed in completely—somewhat like those you see in Breton houses.

It was a clear night, the moon at the full. At ten thirty the "hex-doctor" entered. I have not space to describe him nor the peculiar chants, prayers and gestures that now began. But simultaneously with his appearance the farmer brought in the "bewitched" child. She was about eleven years old, emaciated, literally skin and bone; in the last stages of anaemia, I judged. She was stretched naked upon a blanket on the table. After half an hour of the rites, the witch-doctor went out. He returned with a ewe lamb, a yearling. After a most extraordinary solo chant and series of gestures during which all the rest of us remained kneeling, he drew a knife, slit the living lamb from throat to vent, slit its four legs—and clapped the animal down upon the child which was, of course, at once drenched with its blood. Rapidly he tied the animal and child together, forelegs to arms, hindlegs to her legs; bound them round and round, wrapped the blanket tightly around both and tossed the bundle into the built-in bed, closing the panel on it.

I slept little that night; the scene and its embellishments having had an effect difficult to describe in this brief space. In the morning I went away asking no questions. But I described it to Dr. Lowell, and three months later at his request I went again to the farmhouse. I asked about the child, and the farmer called her. She was as healthy a youngster as I have ever seen!

This I myself saw—both the operation and its apparent result. Dr. Lowell made full notes of it to accompany similar cases he had investigated.

The point is this. The procedure was utterly unscientific, as we know science. No orthodox medical man would believe that the rites and bath of blood could have helped the child. Yet she recovered. Would that farmer have listened to me for a moment, or to any medical expert or anyone else who would try to convince him that rites and blood-bath had nothing to do with the recovery? Certainly not. But if science could discover what really lay behind that recovery; if not a coincidence, then what natural though unknown laws operated in chants and gestures to produce, perhaps, a rhythm that made the blood-bath effective—then a superstition would have been turned into formula, the "supernatural" made natural.

New York, N. Y. A. MERRITT

DON'T FORGET!

CREEP, SHADOW!

A Thrilling Story of Modern Witchcraft

By A. MERRITT

Coming in the August Issue of Famous Fantastic Mysteries

on Sale June 17

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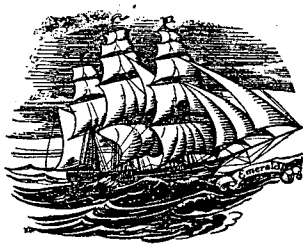
Capt. Baylis (1799-1882)— like many old salts — rocked a keg of whiskey smooth under his *rocker*. This replaced the roll of tossing clippers on which he'd mellowed many a barrel.

Old Salts Rocked Whiskey Mellow . . . gave us the idea for Rocking Chair!

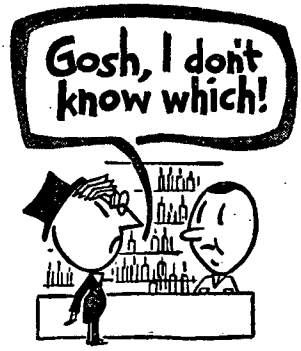


Mr. Boston recognized that "rocking" improves whiskey. So he produces Rocking Chair by *controlled agitation in a special blending process.*

Try Rocking Chair! You will find it a new adventure in flavor — smooth as whiskeys "rocked in the keg". And you'll find the price surprisingly thrifty.

85 Proof (80 Proof in some States)
75% Grain Neutral Spirits
Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

OLD MR. BOSTON
BRAND
ROCKING CHAIR
BLENDED WHISKEY



How I Solved My Liquor Dither

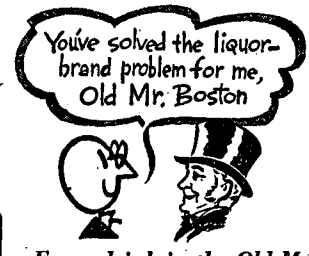
by don herold

I used to quiver with confusion every time I started out to buy some sort of indoor drinking ammunition. I was baffled by brands — hundreds of them. I'm not a liquor expert, are you? I mean, drinking is a pleasure with me—not a life work.

Then an old-timer, a friend of mine who has been around a lot of liquors, said "Settle on Old Mr. Boston."

Yes, sir! "Old Mr. Boston" is a handy handle by which we buyers can grasp this whole liquor-brand proposition.

Just imagine! More than 30 different liquors under ONE name—all good—all pleasant to the palate and purse. There are whiskeys, gins, brandies, and a bunch of tasty cordials and liqueurs. All *Old Mr. Boston.* All reasonable in price.



Every drink in the Old Mr. Boston line smacks of that skilled New England craftsmanship which for three centuries has been the tradition of the great old city of Boston.

Why play hide and seek with liquor brands? Join me today, and settle on good Old Mr. Boston.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, 280 Broadway, New York City.

Dear Editor:

THANKS FOR MONTHLY F.F.M.

I have just received my notification that F.F.M. is to be issued monthly and wish to extend my thanks along with the other fans.

Although this is the first I've written you I have been an avid reader of F.F.M. for three years and mere words cannot express the true enjoyment I receive from it.

I was particularly fond of Giesy's "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and I have been waiting patiently for "The Mouthpiece of Zitu." I like all your authors but like a great many other fans I find Merritt unsurpassed.

I enjoy Francis Stevens and all the others Keep up the good work and thanks again for changing F.F.M. to a monthly.

You may expect a new subscription when my present one is finished.

Keep Finlay on the covers.

ROBERT MCCOWAN.

908 GODFREY AVE.,
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

NEW READER

A few minutes ago, I bought my first copy of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES (April), and like a newcomer in a strange land, was glancing through the magazine to see what I had bought. I got no farther than page 128!

I wonder how many of your readers realize what a wonderful piece of work Virgil Finlay has done in his illustration for "An Unnatural Feud"?

I marvel at the infinite patience and painstaking precision Mr. Finlay has put into those myriad cross-lines, dots and shadings!

Your newest reader,

(MISS) HELEN NICKSON.

Box 135,
PURCELL, OKLA.

FOUND—F.F.M.!

I just bought the April copy of your wonderful magazine, and only wish I had known about it sooner, as I see that I have missed many good stories.

Many of them I read years ago in the Argosy and All-Story but would love to read them again

One that I especially liked was "Dwellers in the Mirage," by A. Merritt.

Your Feb. number was given me by a friend, and I read "Citadel of Fear" and thought it was simply grand. I am looking forward to reading "Burn, Witch, Burn!" which I read a long time ago, and know I shall enjoy reading again. I have also read all of the Radio Planet stories by Ralph Milne Farley but enjoyed this one just as much this time as I did the first time.

I wonder if "Seven Footprints to Satan" is on your list for future issues.

MRS. P. C. JENSEN

442 EMMETT ST.,
BATTLE CREEK, MICH.

Note: "Seven Footprints to Satan" is on the list.

WANTS COMPLETE "MOON POOL"

Many thanks for your recent announcement that the magazine is to be made longer and put on a monthly basis. I, for one, am delighted with the news and intend to renew my subscription next month.

Please add me to the number of readers who have been asking you to reprint the "Moon Pool" stories in single issues. With the enlarged magazine, you should be able to do it more easily.

ALEXANDER FIELD.

37 COLONIAL PL.,
NEW ROCHELLE, N. Y.

ABOUT QUIVVEN AND DOGGO

The March-April issue of F.F.M. concluded a truly superb trilogy. I also want the complete "Blind Spot," before I start reading the three parts I have, or "The Spot of Life." I am awaiting the republication of Austin Hall's "Into the Infinite." "The Rebel Soul" was a very powerful story

Farley sure knocked the socks off me by killing Quivven and Doggo. They seemed so real to me, more so even, than the Princess Lilla, whom I have doubts of being biologically enough like us to produce offspring for Cabot; the differences between radio sense, and sound sense, especially. As I think of the fate Doggo and Quivven fell to, I can't help but believe that the insidious Whoomang larvae have merely driven the ego of the rightful owners into the

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subconscious, while it usurps the conscious mind; and, if that is truly the case, an operation performed on the victim should let the rightful owner regain control.

Thank you, and I sincerely hope that Cabot (probably unknown to even his friend, Farley) will soon launch an expedition to the mid-between island, leaving his and our friends in this desperate condition for no longer than is absolutely necessary.

The mere writing of this letter removed the tension to a great degree, for, to me, Quivven and Doggo were not alien beings, but friendly, and human minded entities as are ourselves.

LYNN H. BENHAM.

411 W. HOWARD ST.,
CROTHERSVILLE, IND.

Note: There is another set of Radio stories, by Farley, and Cabot's adventures continue in "The Radio Menace." "Into the Infinite" will probably be used serially quite soon. It is too long for even our new set-up to be run complete.

WANTS "CREEP, SHADOW!"

I'm an ardent Merritt fan and have yet to find an author that can equal him. I was duly pleased to see that "Burn, Witch, Burn!" was coming in the June issue. How about having "Creep, Shadow!" before too long? I always thought it was one of Merritt's best. Also I would like to see some of Ray Cummings' stories about "Tama of the Light Country."

I enjoyed Farley's Radio Planet stories, and I thought the inside pictures for this last one, "Radio Planet and the Ant Men" were especially good.

Francis Stevens' stories are above the average, so let's hear from him often.

I've always had a craze for fantastics and will read what you print if it comes under that heading.

MRS. J. F. GATES.

30½ NORTH MAIN ST.,
WHITE RIVER JCT., VT.

F.F.M. WELL REVIEWED

Your mag. is a blessing to those of us who make up the branch of the great field of fandom that began to follow this type of literature too recently to even consider, in the joys of finding something new and refreshing under the sun, that there were masterpieces of the same before our time. A thousand thanks.

I have conspired to have every issue of F.F.M. in my hands at least once, except the May-June '40 issue, which mag. eludes my frenzied grasp amazingly. I have, or had, hopes of sometime securing this issue. "Three Lines of Old French" must truly have been a gem, considering the praises it received. On second thought, though, remembering the author, what can one expect?

I have only the first issue of Fantastic Novels. I can only guess at the mental pleasures and ecstasies of reading "People of the Pit" and "Dwellers in the Mirage" beyond the written words of the fans who have praised these stories. And who but A. Merritt can express emotions such as these in the written word?

I think the best way I can give you a true idea of my preferences is to give a list of the stories in the order in which I like them, which is astoundingly difficult.

No. 1—"The Blind Spot," by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint. Consistently, this story takes first place on such a list. The haunting method in which it was told and the tremendous web of the plot, leave a person somewhat at a loss for words. Hall's little errors in English only add to the glamour of the epic; he insists on making them, and a novel would not be a true Hall tale without them. A literary masterpiece is "The Blind Spot," outside its own category and the puny boundaries that must needs be placed around it for the sake of those critics who sit back on soft plush seats, talk tomes upon tomes of great literary classics, and yet, as if to taunt those who write and publish it, completely ignore this branch of literature.

No. 2—"The Citadel of Fear," by Francis Stevens. There is something about Stevens' cool, matter-of-fact style of telling stories that clicks with me to a greater degree than even Merritt's splendid elaborateness. His quiet way of handling great plots is most refreshing. Even though I have placed Hall's epic above this, I can say in the most truthful kind of honesty that I enjoy reading Stevens' work above any other author, and I have read but two of his stories!

No. 3—"The Metal Monster," by Abraham Merritt. It is generally conceded that Merritt is the greatest author in the field. It is with deep regret that I place this masterpiece of weird beauty in third place, but it is only because I enjoyed the former two stories a bit more that I placed them first. As for literary value one would practically be forced to put this in that most coveted position. Merritt is the most beautiful writer I have ever come across. How can I say more?

No. 4—"Claimed," by Francis Stevens. Here's Stevens again; truly a master. The subtle suspense held me avidly, the climax exploded in my face with a force beyond description, and I was left quite breathless.

No. 5—The "Moon Pool" Series, by A. Merritt. Merritt has wrested from me the roots of my vocabulary, but one cannot pass this unforgettable novel on to joyous memory without desiring to say something about it. Briefly, it was superb!

No. 6—The England Trilogy, by George Allan England. I have counted England's three great tales of adventure as one for various rea-

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sons. I could not place one above the other two for such an act would seem blasphemous. The adventure of This Man and This Woman in a world of ruins is little short of breath-taking, and it does not contain the usual formality of relations between a man and a woman in such circumstances, as most of the old-fashioned science-stories do. Real human interest, to say the least.

No. 7—"Palos of the Dog-Star Pack," by J. U. Giesy. Giesy is another adventure artist. This story was unique in more ways than one.

No. 8—"Fungus Isle," by Philip Fisher. This is the first comparatively short-story to break the ranks of the apparently unbreakable hold novels have on the title position over short stories. I don't know what it is about Fisher's little gem that attracts me, but it sure does that!

No. 9—"The Face In the Abyss," by A. Merritt. Not up to Merritt's standard, but nevertheless good enough (or should I say splendid enough?) to steal a position in the "big ten." Oh, what I would give to read the "Snake Mother"!

No. 10—"The Rebel Soul," by Austin Hall. It is quite natural that Hall should have more than one story a favorite of mine. I see that it is one of his first stories by the copyright date, written about two years before the "Blind Spot." However, there is the same superb style.

These stories are only the best ten! I can't pass up some of the other marvelous stories that would rank highly with others, but which from my viewpoint didn't quite reach the peak set by these first ten. There are, of course, Hall's "Man Who Saved the Earth" and "Spot of Life" (which did not measure up to my expectations and was, as a result, somewhat of a disappointment; probably the only reason it did not rate in the first ten); "The Lord of Death," by Homer Eon Flint; "The Moon Metal," by Garrett Serviss; "The Whimpus," by Tod Robbins; "Almost Immortal," by Austin Hall; "On the Brink of 2,000," by Garret Smith; "The Other Man's Blood," by Ray Cummings (the human drama in this story was terrific!); "The Ship of Silent Men," by Philip Fisher; "The Colour Out of Space," by H. P. Lovecraft; The "Radio Man" series, by Ralph Milne Farley (I missed the second of this trilogy, but managed to bridge the resulting brink; this series did not rate as highly with me as did with others); and finally "The Girl In the Golden Atom," by Ray Cummings.

Warren L. Bigelow.

7725 San Fernando Rd.,
Roscoe, Calif.

ALL THIS IS FIXED, SYLVESTER

After finishing the current F.F.M. I arrived at these conclusions. 1. Nobody could ask for a better format or better stories, although they could ask for more pages (with a nominal increase in price as most of your competitors are doing.) 2. My other conclusion is as follows: You delight in subjecting us poor suffering readers to a most unnatural and mind-wracking torture, because of that interminable wait between issues. Why? WHY?

I pity the poor suckers that are buying other mags and not yours. They positively do not know what they are missing else they would rush down to the old corner drug store and avail themselves of this super value in magazine buys. Of course, if they can't find it on the stands, they aren't to blame. How can you buy somethin' which ain't there? I demand (need I remind you that my wishes and demands are LAW) that F.F.M. go monthly if not biweekly. Why, you've got so much A-1 material on hand in your files now that I'll probably be dead before you're able to publish all the stories I want to read, at your present bimonthly rate of publications. OK, then, the question is settled. We are going to resume monthly publication with the June issue| ARRRREN'T WEEEE????!

Re the current issue (April): Farley's effort inferior to "The Radio Man" but just a shade better than "The Radio Beasts." Paul's drawings excellent and what's more important in abundance. Excellent! Finlay's cover superb. Please accept my humble thanks for the trimmed edge. And just the type of trimming I asked for and dreamed about. Maybe there's something to these thought-phantasms (dreams to you). When do we get "Into the Infinite"? Until the June issue. . . .

Sylvester Brown Jr.

7 Arlington Street,
Cambridge, Mass.

MERRITT AND FINLAY BEST

I started reading F.F.M. with the August 1941 issue.

From what I have read so far, I can truthfully say that I have discovered one of the best magazines of its type.

A. Merritt's tale, "The Metal Monster," was superb. In fact I don't believe any author can give one a sense of supernal and unfathomable beauty and otherworldiness as well as Merritt can.

As for Virgil Finlay, no one can compare with him as an illustrator, both for interiors and covers. He puts into his drawings what Merritt puts into his stories. Finlay's cover painting for the October 1941 issue was one of the best I have ever seen on any magazine cover.

I have added Merritt's "Metal Monster," and H. P. Lovecraft's "Colour Out of Space" to my collections of pulp "classics." I believe almost all of Lovecraft's stories are classics of present pulp magazine fiction. And I *know* that I'd rather read Lovecraft's stories than the works

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of most of the so-called modern outstanding writers, the "best-seller" novelists.

TONY RAINES.

c/o J. W. GARRETT,
R.F.D. No. 1,
BRINKMAN, O LA.

MORE FARLEY!

Well, you have a swell mag anyway, but please reprint the "Skylark" series by Smith. They aren't Fantasy, but a little S-F won't hurt once in awhile. The cover for the April ish was just terrifically good. The only stories I didn't like in your mag were the "Spot" stories. The story that made me like your mag was "The Planet Juggler." Boy! What a story that was. Please give us more like it.

"The Radio Planet" was the kind I go for. Please, more of the same kind.

Please reprint any other stories written by England.

Get artist Bok back again.

THOMAS RYAN JR.

138 TOWNSEND ST.,
NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

THANKS FOR "BURN, WITCH, BURN!"

I have discovered that the story "Burn, Witch, Burn!" by A. Merritt is not available in book form, as I once stated in a letter to you. I had my wires crossed a wee bit.

Thanks for letting us have this story in F.F.M. I couldn't get it in second hand books or magazines.

JEROME PADRUTT.

Box 346,
Chippewa Falls,
WIS.

Note: Letters on the June issue in this issue are from readers who have picked up copies distributed before the regular newsstand date.

REPORT ON JUNE ISSUE AS WE GO TO PRESS

I want to thank you for the copy which you supplied to me recently of "Beyond the Great Oblivion." This story was as good as England's "The Afterglow."

I have almost all of the issues of F.F.M.; however the only F.N. I have is "The Dwellers in the Mirage." Also, I would particularly like to get a copy of "The Blind Spot."

The first Merrittale I read was "The Metal Monster." I have read quite a few of them now, including "The Moon Pool," "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," "Three Lines of Old French," "The Face in the Abyss," "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and "The Dwellers in the Mirage."

"The Metal Monster" in my opinion, has the most beautiful descriptive passages of any of

(*Continued on Page* 142)

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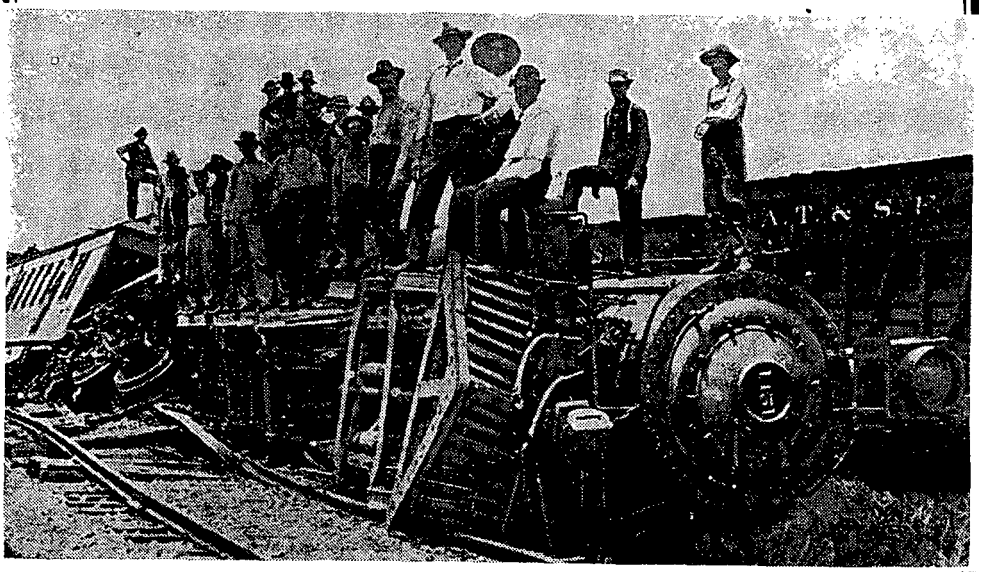

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them. The field of blue poppies and the first flight on the cubes with Norhala are symbolical of these. In no other, not even the classic "The Moon Pool," are the descriptive passages equal to these. "The Metal Monster" fell down in other ways, however. I think that "The Moon Pool" is much better. Its descriptions are almost as good, its characters are much more alive, and its plot is very much better.

I am glad to see that you took my advice (ha, ha!) and went monthly. Merritt's "Burn, Witch, Burn!" is one of the best witch yarns I have ever read, but it is not one of Merritt's greatest stories. The other stories were good, especially Fisher's "Beyond the Pole." It built up a great atmosphere in more ways than one.

I'm glad to hear you're going to reprint "The Moon Pool" complete sometime. Now that we're back to Merritt, let's take up "The Metal Monster" again. I am surprised by the lack of response to it—very few letters even mentioned it. And have you reprinted "The People of the Pit"?

BANKS MEBANE.

RALEIGH RD.,
WILSON, CALIF.

Note: Can anyone supply him with an F.F.M. with "The People of the Pit"?

A "FIRST" LETTER

This is another of those first letters to any magazine.

I like your mag. very much as it is and hope you take no notice of any request to change its format unless it is to double or triple its length. I have always preferred long novels to short stories.

The stories which I enjoyed the most are: "The Blind Spot," "The Snake Mother," "The Spot of Life," "The Dwellers in the Mirage," "The Citadel of Fear," "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack," "Claimed," and "People of the Pit." There are few of the short stories included because I seldom read the F.F.M. when it was composed exclusively of short stories.

The covers which I think the finest of any mags. are those illustrating "The Citadel of Fear," "The Dwellers in the Mirage," "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack," "The Spot of Life," and "The Snake Mother."

GIRARD ST. BIBEAU.

GLEN RIDGE ST.,
WATERBURY, CONN.

POMONA, CALIF. FANS!

I am one of the thankful readers of F.F.M., and if my desires are any criterion of other fans', then you have a huge following. Your mag has given me stories that I had almost given up hope of ever reading, Science Fiction collector that I am.

My chief reason for writing to you at this

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time is to ask you to insert the following item in your readers' columns.

All Science and Fantasy Fiction fans living in or around Pomona, Calif., please get in touch with me at once, in order to form a new fan club. I have a fairly complete Science Fiction library, and many new ideas for a live wire organization. Don't hesitate!!

THOMAS R. DANIEL.

176 W. 2ND ST.,
POMONA, CALIF.

EXCHANGE OFFER

I have received several requests from foreign readers for back issues of your magazine and Fantastic Novels in answer to a letter published in your readers' column some time ago.

I offered to exchange magazines for stamps with people in countries where they were unable to purchase American magazines because of exchange restrictions.

The offer is still open and if you receive requests other than those you publish I'll be glad to try to accommodate the writers. If you wish you may insert the above notice again.

EDWIN ROTHOUSE.

1727 CHELTENHAM AVE.,
PHILADELPHIA, PENNA.

MORE THAN A QUARTER'S WORTH

A friend (a local subscriber for F.F.M.) just told me the good news—monthly publication. Will the higher price indicate more pages, or just increase in paper costs, labor etc? Not that we won't be getting a quarter's worth even with the present number of pages. But more pages would obviously mean more material printed. Which would be more than acceptable.

L. A. E.

c/o FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES,
280 BROADWAY, N. Y.

Note: It's more pages and higher costs, too, L. A. E.

WANTS BACK ISSUES

I have been an ardent science fiction fan for several years and in my opinion the FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES is by far the best magazine in this field. Unfortunately I only have the issues from Aug. 1941 up to and including Apr. 1942. I also have one FANTASTIC NOVELS, the Dec. 1940 issue.

I will answer all letters or postcards which I receive from readers.

So far of the copies I have "The Snake Mother" and "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack" are my favorites.

I think Merritt is uncomparable and would particularly like to have back issues of his stories.

As a last word, thanks for a grand magazine.

MRS. JOHN KRAFT.

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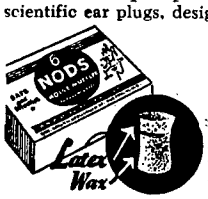

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Just a note to inform you of my recent change of address, which seems to be almost an annual event, but which this time, I hope, will be permanent. Probably the current issue of Famous Fantastic is on its way to my old Watford home.

The first war issues of American news magazines are now on the London bookstalls and reading them it is heartening to see how America is cracking down to the job. We all know it will be heavy going, but that's nothing to what's coming to the enemy when the United Nations are stripped for action and right in the ring. Here in Fleet Street we are at the peak of two hectic months and the pace is increasing.

FRANK ARNOLD.

14 CRAWFORD STREET,
LONDON, W.1, ENGLAND.

PAGING FRANCES NAY

In the April issue of F.F.M. a letter appeared from a Miss Frances Nay, Box 623, Greggton, Texas. I attempted to communicate with her at this address. My letter was returned to me. Would you insert a small notice in "Reader's Viewpoint" where she is bound to see it? Thanks in advance.

Your magazine has been my favorite since Dec. 1939.

BEN RUMSEY JR.

794 UNIVERSITY AVE.,
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

APRIL ISSUE FINE

Your April issue was terrific! I gulped down the final story of the Radio Man trilogy at one sitting, with the short, "An Unnatural Feud," as a side dish. "The Radio Planet" was enthralling, although I thought it quite dated in many places. Many of these fantasy classics, written before the First World War, are overly romantic and stilted—especially in dialogue—but Farley's novel suffers from being written when radio was in swaddling clothes. A great story, nevertheless.

I am droolingly awaiting the Merrittale scheduled for the June issue. And here's hoping "The Ship of Ishtar" is on your list of stories soon to be published. Also, please rush the last two parts of J. U. Giesy's "Palos" trilogy, and more tales by George Allan England.

"The Citadel of Fear" (February issue) struck me as being not as good as "Claimed," also by Francis Stevens.

Finlay and Paul are certainly supplying you with the finest illustrations in the fantasy field, bar none. Incidentally, thanks for the trimmed edges along the side of the current issue (April). This innovation makes F.F.M. very nearly perfect!

D. W. BOGGS.

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments which give you valuable practical experience. My 50-50 method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Broadcasting Stations employ N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other capacities and pay well.

Set Servicing pays many N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50, a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 extra a week in spare time.

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J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 2FK
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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$10 a Week in Spare Time
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Had Own Business 6 Months After Enrolling
"I went into business for myself 6 months after enrolling. In my Radio repair shop I do about $300 worth of business a month. I can't tell you how valuable your Course has been to me."—A. J. BATEN, Box 1168, Gladewater, Texas.

Sergeant in Signal Corps
"I am now a Sergeant in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps. My duties cover Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers, operating Teletypes, handling duties of the Chief Operator in his absence."—SERGEANT RICHARD W. ANDERSON, U. S. Army (Address omitted for military reasons.)

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